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Jeudi
20 mai 2021

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 20 May 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 20 mai 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers/Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MOVING ONTARIANS
MORE SAFELY ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À ASSURER
À LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE
DES DÉPLACEMENTS PLUS SÛRS

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 18, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 282, An Act in respect of various road safety matters / Projet de loi 282, Loi concernant diverses questions de sécurité routière.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: It's an honour to speak to this bill this morning. I was thinking about setting the context for my speech this morning, and I was thinking about—and I think my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin will appreciate this, because it's a story that starts with driving in northern Ontario, and it starts with googling directions.

Two summers ago, my daughter was teaching at Big Grassy reserve, just on the south shore of Lake of the Woods. I went to visit her for the long weekend. People have very little sense of how big this province is. But I flew to Winnipeg, rented a car, drove three hours back across Manitoba, through the United States and back up into Ontario to visit her. We visited for a couple of days.

I have a good friend—I used to be a forest firefighter working out of Geraldton, and my crew leader lives in Kenora, so we wanted to go to Kenora. From Big Grassy reserve to Kenora, by highway, you have to go south and then east and then back north up the west side of Lake of the Woods. But I googled the directions and Google said there was this other road that I could take that took me directly east over to the north-south highway.

So my daughter and I were driving on this road. At first, it's a two-lane asphalt road, and then we cross an intersection and it becomes a two-lane gravel road. I'm thinking, "Oh, that's okay. I used to live in the north. That was actually a very good logging road." Then we turn north, and it's now a one-lane gravel road. I'm thinking, "Okay. Well, you know, hopefully this will get us over to the highway where we need to get to." And then it tells us to

turn right again, and now we're on a road that's two ruts. So it's just room for the tires and then, basically, grass and stuff.

We're driving down this, and my daughter says, "Dad, I think we should turn around." I said, "No, no. It's fine. It's fine. There are lots of these roads in northern Ontario. It will be fine." And then we come to this big puddle, and it's like, I don't know, 20 feet long. I get out of the car and look at the puddle and I poke it with a stick. It all seems solid. It wasn't very deep. My daughter says, "Really, I think we should turn around." I said, "No, no. I think we'll be okay." So we drive through that puddle.

Now, this road is becoming sort of like an ATV trail more than a road, I have got to say, at this point. We come to this other spot and this marsh has swept over the side of the road. It's a puddle that's maybe a hundred feet long. I got out. I poked at it. My daughter says, "Dad, we're turning back. The GPS cut out 20 kilometres ago." At that point, we still have a long ways to go to the highway. At that point I thought, "You know what? It's not just me. My daughter's with me." So we turned around and we backtracked and took the highways up. The lesson that I take from that is, sometimes—and I notice the northern members are really enjoying this story, right? Any story about northern Ontario that starts with, "I was googling directions"—and when you're a southerner, you know it's not going to end well. But the lesson I took was, at some point, when you're on the wrong road, you've got to change directions.

The relevance of that lesson to this bill is, one of the most important parts of this bill is the classification of e-bikes. Under this classification system, most of the e-bikes that are currently in operation in Ontario will be made illegal. At first, when I heard it last week at committee, I thought, "That can't be right. Surely the government of Ontario is not trying to make most of the e-bikes that are currently being used in Ontario illegal." But we heard deputant after deputant. Afterwards, I did some research. I wrote an article for Now Magazine about it. And when I wrote the article for Now Magazine, I sent it to the NDP coms team. They sent it to research and said, "Is this right? Is this factually correct that the classification system this government is proposing for e-bikes in Ontario would make most of them illegal?" And the researcher said yes. Then I sent it to Now Magazine, and the editor came back with the same question.

I want to thank my colleague from Oshawa, who brought up amendment after amendment in a very short time frame. This bill was introduced just two weeks ago. It's been rushed through the Legislature, it's been rushed

through committee and it's being rushed through the third reading. I don't know what the anxiety is for the government to get this bill through, especially when it's on the wrong road. Just like the directions that I googled in northern Ontario didn't work for me, these directions are going to be devastating for the e-bike industry in Ontario. So I'm hoping that the government will listen to not just the opposition here, but to the e-bike industry and retailers across this province who have been telling you that the classification system that you are using or that you're proposing for e-bikes in Ontario will end up making most of them illegal.

I'll talk to it in a little bit more detail here. This all started when the federal government changed its regulations on February 4, 2021. They repealed their definition of power-assisted bicycles. This left this open, so now we need power-assisted bicycles—e-bikes, basically—we need a new clarification system. The Globe and Mail was actually very critical of the federal government, and I agree. It would be far better to have national standards for e-bikes rather than be doing it province by province, because that way, when we're inviting e-bike retailers and hopefully e-bike manufacturers into Ontario, we could say, "Hey, we've got a national standard. If you make your bikes in Toronto or you make your bikes in Ontario, you can sell them anywhere in Canada." But unfortunately, the federal government did not do that, and so it is left to the provinces. It would be far better if the provinces were all to get together and decide on a classification system.

On that classification system, what we heard at committee from gentlemen like Ben Cowie, who runs a bicycle company in London, Ontario, was that he was saying that Europe and most of the States have very similar e-bike classifications. There are three classifications, and they limit the speed. The first one is a pedal-assist. The maximum speed is 32 kilometres an hour and the maximum wattage is 500 watts. There's a little bit of variation, but basically, that's the standard. There's a second class: It's a pedal-assist, with or without a throttle. Again, it's 32 kilometres an hour and a 500-watt bike. The third one is a pedal-assist only, and it's got an upper speed of 45 kilometres an hour. Those upper speeds are not necessarily the maximum, but they're the maximum speed at which the electric assist cuts out. So if a person is pedalling and wants to go faster than 30 kilometres an hour, they can still do it but they have to do it under their own power.

0910

These are the standards that are in place in both Europe and in most of the United States, and so this is the standard that deputant after deputant was telling us to bring forward in Ontario, so that if somebody is importing e-bikes into Ontario, they don't have to have a special order just for Ontario. They can actually bring in bikes that have the same classification system as in Europe and the United States.

They were also hoping, some of these companies, to manufacture e-bikes in Ontario. The importance of this—e-bikes are not just a recreational vehicle; these are a major form of transportation. They are the fastest-growing form

of transportation in the world. The sales are doubling each year. There's currently 2.1 million e-bikes being sold per year. That's expected by 2030 to hit 17 million e-bikes per year. The hope would be that some of those e-bikes would be manufactured in Ontario. It would be wonderful to have a Canadian company, a major brand of e-bikes, being manufactured in Ontario. But why would a company set up an e-bike manufacturing outlet in Ontario when, if they manufactured them here according to Ontario standards, they can't sell them across the border to the United States and they can't export them to Europe?

You've created this legislation that is before us. There's still a chance for this government to change it, to go back to committee, to pull it back before you finalize this legislation. There's a chance to actually create an opportunity for the e-bike industry in Ontario, because currently what we've got before us is actually going to be a competitive disadvantage for our province and for this industry.

I'll give you some examples of what it means. I talked to Mike Stein, who is the general manager of Amego e-bikes on Richmond Street in my riding. He says that he has had a quadrupling of sales in this past year. During the pandemic, the number of e-bikes that he was selling went up four-fold. Now this government is saying that a lot of those bikes that he's sold are going to be illegal on the roads in Ontario. So what does that mean to all those buyers, all those thousands and thousands of buyers of those e-bikes? How is this going to be enforced? Are you going to be reimbursing those people for those bikes that you have suddenly made illegal? Or are you going to make some sort of exemption for them in regulation? You're creating a chaotic regulatory environment and legislative environment for this industry.

I was talking about the importance of this to the economy. Deloitte expects the e-bike industry in the next three years to be a \$26-billion-a-year global industry. People are using e-bikes to replace cars.

Derek Rayside is a resident in my riding and he lives right down near Yonge and the waterfront. He's married and they have two kids. They gave up their family car four years ago, and part of the reason they gave up their family car was because he would be driving somewhere, he would come back, and the last kilometre to get down to Queens Quay and Yonge area would be 45 minutes, just to cover that last kilometre, because sometimes there would be a Leafs game getting out or a Blue Jays game getting out. There are so many events. We have a wonderful tourism industry in the downtown waterfront and people appreciate it, but it does make traffic very, very congested. So the e-bikes are actually one of the solutions to this congestion.

Anyway, he gave up his car, the family car, and they've got a triple tandem e-bike. He and his wife and one of the kids can get on this triple tandem e-bike, and they will get on the Martin Goodman Trail and ride all the way to Etobicoke, to the Costco in Etobicoke, and buy their groceries and ride all the way back. Their other child will use his own bike, which is also an e-bike. He said that the e-bikes

gives them the range and the ability to carry cargo like that. He said that the other place that they go is the science centre. To get to the science centre, they have to go along the Martin Goodman Trail and then up the Don Valley bicycle trail. I don't have an exact estimate, but I would guess it's probably a 10- or 15-kilometre ride. With two young kids, it's too much to do without the electric assist, but the electric assist means that they can travel that far in an environmentally friendly way, and this is the other advantage of e-bikes. They reduce congestion and they're environmentally friendly, because they're just charged. As long as we have a green energy system that's developed where we're producing electricity through renewable resources, then we can use that electricity and get out of the combustion engines, the gas-powered vehicles.

I worry about this legislation and this current piece around e-bikes. I was thinking about it in terms of Dragons' Den. I was thinking that if there were some young entrepreneurs in Ontario who came to Dragons' Den and they said, "Look, we've got this e-bike industry. Our sales have quadrupled in the last year. We've got our own design. We want to manufacture these and we need the capital investment to manufacture these e-bikes in Ontario," the Dragons would look at that and say, "Look, you've got a good track record. I appreciate your ambition, but if you look at the legislation that was just passed by the Conservative government in Ontario, they're making most of those e-bikes that you want to manufacture illegal." They're actually snuffing out this fastest-growing manufacturing opportunity in the world. E-bikes are the fastest-growing form of transportation that's being sold in the world. They are going to outsell electric cars in Europe within a year or two.

I would ask the government to please consider revamping this piece before you pass this legislation, because you're impacting our economy, it's going to impact our environment and it's going to add to the road congestion. The road congestion in the GTHA costs us \$6 billion a year. If you have that family, like Derek's family, on bicycles rather than cars, they're taking up just a small portion of the space of a car. When people are on bicycles, more people can move through the city with less congestion. That will reduce that \$6 billion a year that we throw away every year because of traffic congestion in the city.

I've got a few minutes. There's one other section of this bill that I wanted to talk to. That's on the subject of doorings. Doorings are an issue that is really important to me. I'm an avid cyclist. I was doored in 2018 while riding along Bloor Street. It was a section—at that time, the bike lanes stopped around Bay Street. So I'm just past where the bike lanes are. A vehicle pulled past me and it stopped three feet out from the curb. A passenger got out of the back door. If they had tried to time it to get me, they couldn't have done it any better. It's just like I'm riding along, they pull past me, they stop just in front of me and a passenger gets out of the door, without even pulling over to the curb or anything, no warning whatsoever. So I got doored. My thigh was badly bruised. I'm limping around.

It was a ride-share driver. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was actually going into shock. My blood pressure is normally 80 over 120. The ambulance eventually came. At first I said, "No, no. I'm fine. I'm fine," because you do that when you're in shock. But my blood pressure, actually, when the ambulance driver took it, was 180. So I was going into shock.

But, anyway, I'm dealing with this thing. After the accident, I talked briefly to the passenger and he gave me his phone number. Then he had to go, because he was in a meeting. I talked to the driver. I said, "I need your licence and registration." She said, "No, no. This has nothing to do with me. It's between you and the passenger." I said, "No, no. We just had an accident. By law, you have to give me your licence and registration." The police came eventually. Somebody called the police, because I'm limping around and I'm probably getting kind of pale. I'm trying to tell this woman, "No, no, you've got to give me your information." The police came and said, "Actually, this is a grey area in law."

0920

In 2011, doorings were downgraded from accidents to incidents by the former Liberal government. The police did not have a report form for these doorings. Normally, they would fill out an accident report. He said, "I'll write one for you, but this isn't actually the proper form. We don't have a protocol for dealing with these doorings." At one point, the woman who was driving that vehicle started to leave, and the ambulance actually chased her and brought her back. But with the standards of the day, I don't know whether she didn't have the right to leave. It was all very grey and murky, and I was trying to deal with this while going into shock. I was on the Toronto Board of Health at the time. We brought forward a motion to the city, and we asked the city to ask the province to change doorings back from incidents to accidents.

That change is being made in this legislation, so thank you to the government for making that change. It's something that I've been advocating for for a number of years. We need more action on doorings.

The other thing I was asking for was that there be mandatory training for rideshare drivers. Driving a rideshare is very different from driving a regular vehicle because you are picking up and dropping off people all day, often in very congested places like the city of Toronto. So I would ask that that also be amended in this act.

There are some other things that could be done to reduce the number of doorings. My colleague Marit Stiles, the member from Davenport, brought forward a motion to teach the Dutch reach, which is a system that they use in Holland. They teach people that instead of opening your door—if you're on the driver's side—with your left hand, use your right hand. It forces you to turn around. It forces you to do a shoulder check. That can also reduce the number of doorings. It would be nice to see the Dutch reach also be taught as part of the G1 driver training.

So I'd ask the government—with the dooring, you're making a good step; there are more steps that need to be made. But the e-bikes issue—you've got that wrong, and

you really, really need to change this legislation before you pass it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions to the member for Spadina–Fort York?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I listened intently to the member from Spadina–Fort York’s presentation. He talked a lot about e-bikes. I don’t want to talk about e-bikes.

I want to talk about towing. The MOMS Act proposes the Towing and Storage Safety and Enforcement Act, which would require tow operators, tow truck drivers and vehicle storage operators to have a provincial certificate to operate. It also proposes vehicle and equipment requirements for tow trucks and provides protections for persons requesting or receiving towing and storage services.

To the member from Spadina-Fort York: Would you agree with the steps that we have outlined to combat the fraud and criminal activity seen and experienced by many in the towing industry?

Mr. Chris Glover: In committee, we heard about the towing issue. Certainly, there is a lot of criminal activity. The media has exposed what’s going on with the towing industry. It definitely needs to be cleaned up. We heard that from the CAA and from the Ontario Good Roads deputants when they were speaking to committee.

So there are parts of this bill that are very good, but there are other parts of this bill that are going to really harm Ontario, particularly the e-bike section of the bill.

This is one of the things that happens in this Legislature. Eventually, you’re going to be standing up and you’re going to be saying, “Oh, the opposition voted against cleaning up the towing industry,” when actually, the same legislation—what we do not want to support is making all of these e-bikes illegal. It would be better if you actually had multiple bills rather than one omnibus bill, and then we could debate each issue separately.

But the towing industry one—yes, that’s an important step to make to clean up that industry.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I listened intently to my colleague’s remarks.

During the story about your experience of being doored, all I could think about was a really large crash that happened in F1 last year. Romain Grosjean went into a steel barrier at 192 kilometres an hour at 67 Gs. The car split in half and burst flames.

He walked away from that crash largely because the body that oversees F1 over the years has put in place incredible safety measures like a halo, which people resisted for a long time. The halo is a ring around the top of the car that protects the driver’s head. All I could think was that people in F1 cars going 192 kilometres an hour into a steel wall are more likely to survive than a cyclist going 14 or 15 kilometres an hour on a road in Ontario, and how that must feel.

My question to the member is: What do we need to do to help people not resist the changes that we need to make to make our roads as safe for cyclists as they are for F1 drivers?

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you very much for that question. This is the thing about bicycles and pedestrians: Cyclists and pedestrians are the vulnerable road users.

There were a number of amendments that were brought forward to the committee, particularly by the member from Oshawa, to improve the road safety for vulnerable road users. They were all voted down by the government. This is really, really unfortunate.

As a cyclist in the city of Toronto—I get around: I drive, I cycle and I also skateboard here sometimes. I’m supportive of all different modes of transportation. We need to make them all safe. I think the city should be congratulated for the expansion of the cycling lane network, but we need to do much more.

On the dooring piece, there are a number of things that we could do, particularly mandating training for those rideshare drivers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, and good morning, Mr. Speaker.

My question is to the member opposite. Many of us commute distances to come to the Legislature. Once we start to see the province open up again, we’re going to see, of course, more people on the highways, either going to tourist attractions or perhaps to their summer residence. Historically, we have seen people working on our highways, and it has always amazed me how risky, really, that job is. Even as a flag person, woman or man, working on the highways certainly presents a heightened sense of risk because you are dealing with people who are behind a 2,000-pound piece of equipment that could cause a lot of damage.

This particular proposed MOMS Act will improve working conditions for our highway workers by allowing the use of automated traffic control devices to direct traffic at a construction site. I’m wondering if the member opposite agrees that we should adopt technology like the automatic flagger assistance device to protect workers who are maintaining and building our highways.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you very much for the question. I noticed the government side aren’t asking about what the majority of my speech was about, which was e-bikes and the classification system that’s going to make most of them illegal. Ask me a question about that and how you could change this legislation to improve it so e-bikes are not made illegal.

As far as improving the safety of road workers, absolutely, every step that can be taken should be taken to improve the safety of workers. They’re absolutely vital. Road construction is so important. Our road network is so important. It’s so important that it be maintained. No one should ever be in danger when they’re working on our roads.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kiiwetinoong.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: When we talk about the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act, 2021, I think about the north. I know there’s a long discussion of e-bikes.

When this government came into power in 2018, I remember the former Minister of Transportation coming to me and saying, “Sol, I just got briefed and I didn’t know that we ran airports.” So when I talk about travel, when I talk about moving Ontarians safely, all I’ve got is airports. When we talk about e-bikes—like, sorry.

I know that we talked about northern travel and whatever, and I think it’s important when we talk about Ontarians—it’s just so foreign to me when you talk about e-bikes or when we talk about the towing or Metrolinx. We don’t have highways; the sky is the highway for us.

I’m just wondering: If we talk about safety in the north, when we talk about keeping Ontarians safe, what do you see in the north that you spoke about?

0930

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Kiiwetinoong for that question. It’s a question I’d love to have a dialogue with you about. My only experience in the fly-in communities: When I was on the forest fire crew, I was on a fire in Webequie. They had a gravel runway and that’s what we flew in to. That gravel runway had just been built. Before that, they only flew in by water. In the summertime, they had planes with pontoons on that landed on the water, and in the wintertime, they made an ice runway on the lake. Actually, the member from Kiiwetinoong is nodding, because he knows this very well. I don’t know if other fly-in—this is many years ago. I don’t know what the situation is, but certainly the airport safety of those fly-in communities in the north is paramount, because that is their lifeline through most of the year.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Speaker, through you to the member opposite: As we are discussing Bill 282, this legislation currently being debated is all about enabling legislation for future regulations and safety. This MOMS Act ensures that e-bikes, including cargo e-bikes that are permitted in Ontario today, will continue to be permitted as e-bikes or under the Cargo E-Bikes Pilot Program. Municipalities will choose which classes of e-bikes would be permitted in their jurisdiction, because municipalities know what’s best for their jurisdiction, their municipal roads. Would the member opposite agree that municipalities are in the best position to decide which e-bikes to have on their roads?

Mr. Chris Glover: There are different roles and there’s different expertise. The municipalities certainly know where e-bikes belong within their jurisdiction. There are bike lanes where maybe e-bikes are appropriate or maybe they’re not. But what the Globe and Mail has said is that we need a national standard of e-bikes so that we’re not creating a competitive disadvantage by having different standards, province by province and municipality by municipality. Can you imagine if you wanted to manufacture e-bikes in Ontario and every municipality had a different classification system? How could you possibly set up a manufacturing outlet? It just doesn’t make sense.

So, please, talk with other provinces and talk with—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Next, we have the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I rise this morning to speak to the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act, also known as the MOMS Act. The provisions in this act would enhance protections for vulnerable road users and consumers, improve commercial vehicle and the safety of highway workers and strengthen the province’s oversight of the towing and vehicle storage industry.

Mr. Speaker, street racing and stunt driving are among the most serious threats on our roadways. Our government is committed to combatting bad driving behaviour. It’s reckless, it’s dangerous and it’s a serious crime. Between 2013 and 2019, the number of driver’s licence suspensions issued for street racing and stunt driving increased 130%. Between March and August 2020, roadside driver’s licence suspensions for street racing and stunt driving increased an additional 52%. Nearly 5% of drivers suspended during this period had one or more previous suspensions in the previous five years.

Based on our current data, every three and a half hours someone is injured in a speed-related crash right here in Ontario. Drivers between the ages of 16 to 25 are responsible for many of these collisions. The proposed street racing and stunt driving measures in this MOMS Act are intended to enhance and strengthen Ontario’s existing stunt driving penalty regime by expanding its application and removing any loopholes that may exist.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw a significant decrease in traffic on our roadways. In some rural areas, the roads were almost empty. Unfortunately, during this very same period, there was a corresponding increase in bad driving behaviour. Many drivers took open roads as an invitation to put their foot on the gas pedal. This proposed legislation introduced by our government will hopefully put the brakes on stunt driving and street racing on Ontario’s highways.

As our Solicitor General, Sylvia Jones, has said, “Stunt driving and street racing are serious threats that have posed a greater risk to our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

This legislation proposes increased penalties and sanctions under the MOMS Act. The MOMS Act is not only about the action our government is taking against stunt driving and street racing. As part of the proposed legislation, we are embracing new technologies to make informed decisions and to improve safety on our roads. It also includes the creation of a new Towing and Storage Safety and Enforcement Act, which will ensure police services across the province have the tools they need to combat high-risk driving on Ontario’s roads.

Mr. Speaker, during the very first few months of the initial lockdown last spring, police in York region impounded nine vehicles in one night following a rash of stunt driving incidents that officers said was connected to COVID-19 restrictions. Police said the nine drivers were travelling more than 50 kilometres above the posted speed limit. Again, these examples simply underscore the gravity of the problem of high-speed driving during the pandemic.

Just two and a half months into the pandemic, York Regional Police laid 306 stunt driving charges against

drivers travelling more than 50 kilometres above the speed limit. To offer a comparison, over the same period in 2019, York police laid 149 such charges.

In one incident, police impounded a vehicle being driven by a 16-year-old on Highway 7 in Vaughan. The teenage driver, who has a G1 licence, was allegedly driving 120 kilometres an hour in a 60-kilometre-an-hour zone. The police officer who pulled the car over had the young man call his mother, who had no idea her son had even taken the car out for a drive.

Police services across the province have been reporting a spike in dangerous and high-speed driving. The spike is largely attributed to the restrictions required to combat COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, street racing is a problem in my hometown of Hamilton as well, particularly in my riding of Flamborough–Glanbrook. Flamborough–Glanbrook is a largely rural area with open roads that invite reckless drivers to run their vehicles at dangerous speeds. In one incident, a 25-year-old driver was handed an automatic roadside licence suspension and had his vehicle impounded for seven days for going 53 kilometres over the posted speed limit. In September last year, police were called to the Cineplex parking lot in Ancaster after being told by a provincial task force that a street racing rally was about to get under way.

On Monday, Burlington OPP tweeted that they stopped a 30-year-old driver for going 46 kilometres an hour over the posted limit on Highway 407. According to police, the driver said, “I thought you would only get charged for doing 50 over.”

A few days earlier, a motorcycle driver was pulled over for tearing down Highway 407 in Burlington at 166 kilometres an hour. He told police he had been going that speed for quite some time with absolutely no problems. Well, he does have a problem now. His bike was impounded, and he was charged with stunt driving.

On the same day in Toronto, two drivers were clocked at more than 200 kilometres an hour. Each had their vehicle impounded, their driver’s licence suspended and are now heading to court on stunt driving charges.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few examples of why our government is taking strong action to protect road users against unsafe and aggressive driving.

The MOMS Act introduces new measures to combat high-risk driving and to improve road safety. The measures include longer driver’s licence suspensions and longer vehicle impoundment periods for drivers engaged in stunt driving, street racing and aggressive driving.

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As a mother of two sons in their 20s, I am alarmed by the increasing numbers of young drivers who are caught stunt driving and street racing. This disturbing trend in such dangerous driving behaviors is evidence that existing penalties and sanctions are no longer effective in deterring stunt driving and street racing.

By imposing stiffer vehicle impoundment and licence suspension penalties, the MOMS Act sends a clear message to reckless and dangerous drivers.

Mr. Speaker, I’d like to take a moment now to talk about the stiffer penalties proposed for stunt driving and street racing.

If passed, the MOMS Act would increase the roadside driver’s licence suspension and vehicle impoundment period for drivers caught street racing or stunt driving to 30 days—the vehicle would be impounded for 14 days. Currently, both suspension periods are seven days each.

The legislation also proposes escalating penalties for repeat offences. On conviction for a first offence, the driver’s licence would be suspended for a minimum of one to three years; for a second offence, a minimum of three to 10 years; for a third offence, the penalty would be a lifetime driver’s licence suspension. A lifetime suspension for a third offence could be reduced at a later date. However, a fourth and subsequent offence would result in a lifetime driver’s licence suspension, period.

We are also proposing lowering the threshold for stunt driving charges of driving 40 kilometres per hour or more above the speed limit on roads where the posted limit is less than 80 kilometres an hour.

Mr. Speaker, these are substantial increases to the existing penalties that send a strong message to drivers that their foolish and dangerous behavior on Ontario’s roads will simply not be tolerated. It’s anticipated that harsher penalties will deter drivers from engaging in street racing and stunt driving.

We know that speed continues to be one of the worst killers on Ontario roads. Travelling at high speeds on our highways puts the life of the driver and others in jeopardy. The risk of fatality or serious injury is approximately 11 times greater when vehicles are involved in a collision at 50 kilometres or more over a posted speed limit when compared to vehicles driving at or below the posted speed limit.

The MOMS Act targets the worst offenders on our roadways by creating escalating suspensions for repeat offenders and setting a lower speed threshold for stunt driving charges on municipal roads.

With this proposed legislation, our government is taking concrete action to protect people—to protect families, to protect pedestrians on our roads. We are determined to keep Ontario’s roads among the safest in North America. As the Premier has said, we will not sit by and do nothing while drivers are found speeding well over the limit and being reckless on our roads. The MOMS Act is a significant continuation of the work our government is doing to strengthen road safety.

Driving is a privilege, and those who threaten the safety of others have no place on Ontario roads.

Our government’s message is clear: Drivers who put lives at risk are on our radar. We will not tolerate their careless disregard for the safety of others.

Mr. Speaker, in January of this year, municipalities, road safety stakeholders and enforcement agencies were consulted on a list of high-priority, high-impact proposals aimed at targeting stunt driving, street racing and reckless driving. For the most part, stakeholders were very supportive of these safety initiatives.

Our government's efforts are being applauded by police forces and safe driving advocates across Ontario.

Superintendent Scott Baptist of the Toronto Police Service said, "By creating a series of escalating sanctions for aggressive driving behaviours, it will focus the most significant repercussions on those most deserving—those who would completely disregard the law, putting the lives and safety of other road users in jeopardy."

"This is an important first step toward realizing a future where Ontarians are no longer fatally injured or seriously hurt on our roadways," said Scott Butler, the executive director of the Ontario Good Roads Association.

But the MOMS Act is not only about street racing and stunt driving. We are also committed to combatting other unsafe driving habits, such as distracted driving. We are fighting distracted driving by ensuring that the public is aware of its preventable dangers and consequences.

The measures included in the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act target the bad drivers on Ontario's roads who put everyone's safety at risk. The measures in the MOMS Act also help shield vulnerable road users from harm. Pedestrians and roadside workers are exposed to injury and possibly death by dangerous drivers each and every day. If passed, the MOMS Act introduces measures to protect vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and those working on our highways.

We know that responsible driving makes roads safer for everyone. That is why the MTO monitors trends in driving behaviours to identify concerning trends. That way we can make changes to the rules and penalties to ensure that everyone is safe. This proposed legislation would authorize MTO transportation enforcement officers to close a road, drive along closed roads and direct traffic as part of their duties when responding to emergencies or assisting in collision investigations.

Our government would permit the use of automated traffic control devices, known as automated flagger assistance devices, as an additional traffic control tool in construction zones. We've all seen construction workers standing on the road holding a stop sign for drivers when two lanes are reduced to one. This measure would reduce the need for construction workers to physically stop traffic themselves. The proposed legislation would also permit vehicles used in highway construction projects to back up on divided highways only if the movement is safe.

Bryan Hocking of the Ontario Road Builders' Association praises our government for introducing this safety measure. Hocking said, "Initiatives that crack down on stunt driving, that allow for the use of automated flagger devices are important tools that will make construction zones safer for workers and make our roadways safer for all Ontarians."

The MOMS Act would also introduce additional tools to address commercial vehicle drivers who violate hours-of-service rules. It would clarify dimensional limits for trailers. It would permit technical standards to be incorporated in the Highway Traffic Act by reference rather than requiring a legislative or regulatory amendment. This change would ensure that the most updated version of

standards will be automatically incorporated into the HTA.

The MOMS Act, if passed, would strengthen provincial oversight of the towing sector. It would create the Towing and Storage Safety and Enforcement Act by amending four statutes. The provisions in the proposed TSSEA would require tow operators, tow truck drivers and vehicle storage operators to be certified and to meet prescribed requirements and standards. Set standards would be required for customer protection and roadside behaviours, including penalties for non-compliance. A director of towing and vehicle and storage standards would be established to provide oversight.

When your vehicle is broken down, the last thing the driver wants to worry about is whether their tow truck operator can actually be trusted. Mr. Speaker, these changes will protect customers and give them the confidence they need, when they're waiting by the side of the road for a tow, that a reliable and reputable tow truck driver will be there to assist them.

During our consultations with stakeholder groups, there was a strong recommendation that a new provincial oversight regime is required for the towing industry. Many of the stakeholders' suggestions, including training for tow truck drivers, creating a level playing field for the towing sector, offering customer protection for commercial vehicles and ensuring fair pricing, are all recognized in this legislation.

Throughout the regulation development process there will be regular consultations with stakeholders. Teresa Di Felice of CAA said, "Many reputable tow operators ... already provide safe, honest and professional services." Di Felice echoed the view that by elevating provincial standards combined with regulatory oversight, Ontario further strengthens the towing profession and inspires greater consumer confidence in the towing industry.

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OPP Commissioner Thomas Carrique commended our government for introducing the safety measures in the MOMS Act. He said, "It's an important step towards addressing the serious road safety issues created by aggressive drivers and unsafe towing practices."

By introducing the provisions in the MOMS Act, our government is going further to improve road safety in Ontario, protect vulnerable road users, and improve protections and standards for consumers and businesses.

Mr. Speaker, those of us who have ridden streetcars in Toronto know that getting on and off the vehicle can be dangerous. Many drivers simply ignore rules and blow right past the open streetcar doors, but that kind of reckless driving has been difficult to deter.

Our government has heard loud and clear from commuters in Toronto about how hazardous getting on and off a streetcar can actually be. That is why our government is introducing an automated camera enforcement framework for streetcars that will allow transit agencies to submit photo evidence of vehicles that illegally pass streetcars when they pick up or drop off passengers. This means that drivers who endanger the lives of streetcar passengers by

flying past their open doors could soon get an automatic ticket if caught by an automated camera. If passed, the legislation would amend the Highway Traffic Act to authorize the use of photo evidence to automatically ticket drivers who illegally pass streetcars.

While illegal passing of a streetcar's open doors is actually difficult to enforce because currently there is simply no way to capture the licence plate of an offending driver's vehicle, the proposal to allow cameras on streetcars would change that. There have been far too many incidents of pedestrians being injured while stepping off a streetcar.

Mr. Speaker, if passed, the MOMS Act will also set out new standards for e-bikes. It would allow for the fine-tuning of e-bike rules by municipalities by creating new definitions for e-bikes, or power-assisted bicycles, in the Highway Traffic Act.

Mr. Speaker, for all of these reasons, I urge you and all members in this House to support the MOMS Act. Our lives and the lives of our loved ones could depend on it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions for the member for Flamborough–Glanbrook?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I listened to the government member talk about the road safety measures that are in this bill. They're needed, right? The tow trucking, the stunting, the speeding. What I didn't hear about is the other road safety measures that could be implemented which could be looked at from a dooring perspective. It's also very much a safety concern for vehicles and bicyclists.

During the committee presentations, I know deputants talked about asking this government to adopt Bill 62, the Protecting Vulnerable Road Users Act, and also Bill 89, which is the Teach the Reach Act. During the committee amendments process, the NDP asked this government and proposed that we put these two bills into the MOMS Act to further strengthen road safety. As this bill, as the member has talked about, is all about road safety, why did the government not choose to implement Bill 62 and Bill 89 to strengthen it further?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Our province has a long history of permitting automated camera-based enforcement programs. In fact, back in 2004, the province passed legislation to permit municipalities to use red light cameras to deter intersection violations. In December 2019, Ontario implemented new regulations and provisions contained in the Safer School Zones Act, 2017, to permit municipalities to deploy automated speed enforcement, or the ASE system. In July 2020, the municipalities of Toronto and Ottawa became the first jurisdictions in Ontario to begin active camera enforcement in designated school zones.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed streetcar camera framework will be an opt-in program for municipalities, the same as other programs. Municipalities will be responsible for all aspects of program administration, including procuring camera technology, processing photographic evidence and laying charges. All of these measures will help keep our roads safer.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thanks to the member for her presentation and speaking very passionately about this.

It's called the MOMS Act. I know you are a mother. Could you speak a little bit about what this means to you as a mother, knowing that your children—I mean, they're not children anymore, but children across this province will be kept safer, and what it means to you as a mother?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you so much for the question. As a mom—I have two young boys and they like cars. I have seen their friends drive and they like their vehicles as well. I think part of the problem is that the penalties that currently exist just weren't enough of a deterrent to young people who think that they are simply immune to risk and to penalties.

What we are doing is we're focusing on targeting, especially, young people. As the statistics that I mentioned in my report said, between 16 and 24 tend to be the highest offenders of stunt driving and stunt racing. These measures will act as a deterrent. It will be lenient enough to give them a break if they truly, truly can show that they can change their driving habits. But as a former reporter, I covered far too many stories of young people who have caused hardship to others and to their own families simply because they thought that they could speed 40, 50 kilometres over the posted speed limit, that they simply wouldn't face any penalties. This is a deterrent. It will prevent them from speeding and hopefully save a lot more lives.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to thank the member for her presentation earlier. I do have a question, though, about stunt driving and penalties. My riding, Toronto–Danforth, borders the Don Valley Parkway. We have an ongoing summer problem with motorcyclists, biker gangs, engaged in stunt driving and racing on the Don Valley. The problem we have is not that there's a lack of penalties, although I have no problem with greater penalties for stunt driving; we just can't get anyone to enforce the law. So I would appreciate it if the member would say how higher penalties will stop stunt driving when you can't even get the law enforced today on existing penalties.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question. We have been working with stakeholders, including members of police forces from across Ontario, who are supportive of the measures that we are implementing, that we are proposing. It's that awareness and that constant dialogue and that relationship with our police departments right across Ontario that will ensure that they will recognize the value in enforcing these laws.

I just want to go over it, Mr. Speaker, if I may. With the increase in these penalties, I do believe that once we as legislators spread the word, once the media spreads the word and once police do enforce it, it will truly act as a deterrent. For a first offence, a minimum of one to three years of your driver's suspension; a second offence, a minimum of three to 10 years; a third offence, a lifetime suspension that may be reduced at a later date; but the fourth and subsequent offences is a lifetime driver's licence suspension.

We will be creating the lower speed threshold for stunt driving charges of driving 40 kilometres per hour or more

above the limit on roads where the speed limit is less than 80, and we will introduce a default speed limit of 80 kilometres per hour on a highway not within a local municipality or a built-up area.

Mr. Speaker, the deterrents, coupled with public education and working with stakeholders, should address your concerns.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to ask a question about stunt driving. The Legislature passed a motion not long ago calling for higher penalties for stunt driving offences, and this legislation appears to respond to that. Could the member provide some further information about what the proposed new penalties are and the reasons behind them?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Yes, I'd love to. Our government is very, very concerned about the increase in the number of drivers that we have seen participating in street racing, stunt driving and other kinds of high-risk and aggressive driving. High-risk driving behaviours regularly cause injury and death on our roads and the recent trends are moving in the wrong direction, as I stated in my comments earlier. We have seen more and more people take advantage of our lower-utilized highways by stunt driving. As I said, in my own community, we've had police report excessive speeds for young people who are on rural roads simply because people are staying home more often—and, of course, even massive gatherings, where they were going to be hosting a stunt driving rally; luckily, the police were able to prevent that from going forward.

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Based on our current data, every three and a half hours, someone is injured in a speed-related crash in Ontario, with drivers between 16 to 25 accounting for a considerable percentage of these collisions. The proposals implemented in this bill will address the need, will address how young people are thinking that they are immune to any sort of danger or penalty. It will provide higher penalties and hopefully keep more people in Ontario safe.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to go to an analogy the member from Spadina–Fort York used at the start of his statement: When the government is going down a certain path, and that path or that road has two lanes, it becomes two ruts. It becomes a path, and then you're obstructed with an obstacle. At that point in time, you have to make the decision to turn around or pick up a phone and call someone for help.

Well, on this particular bill, there's no disputing that the towing industry—because I've personally shared those stories in regard to what I've experienced with some friends who have relocated from southern Ontario to northern Ontario because of the chaos that is going on in the industry. There's no disputing the road workers.

There are some disputes, there is some help, and there are some guides. There are some red flags that have been sent out to this government in regard to the e-bikes. Why won't you pick up a phone or turn around and go back to

the beginning and come back down the right path so you could have good legislation which all of us support in this House?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm pleased to actually rise for this question. It's funny, because I say “northern Ontario,” but I know we won't all agree that, say, Sudbury is northern Ontario; it's probably middle Ontario. But Toronto is not Ontario. We have to start looking to other municipalities. I'm a former city councillor. What works in Toronto doesn't necessarily work in other parts of Ontario. This Legislature often is so Toronto-centric. This is not Sudbury. This is not Thunder Bay. This is not North Bay. This is not London. We have different needs in our municipalities, and I think what we are doing is the right way to approach e-bikes. Let municipalities determine what's good for their people. They know best.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a pleasure to take my place on behalf of the good people of Algoma–Manitoulin. I'll be sharing some of my time this morning with the member from Toronto Centre.

I've always promised my constituents that when any piece of legislation comes to the floor, I will debate and I will bring suggestions from a northern perspective. But before I do that, Speaker, I want to ask for your indulgence. I want to give a shout-out to one of Elliot Lake's strongest heroes. His name is Elijah. Elijah is over at Sick-Kids right now, and Elijah has gone through some major, major miracle heart surgery yesterday. His mom provided me with this update, and this is for the people on the north shore and in Elliot Lake: They took out his first ventricle and gave him two with a lot of tunnels and patches—miracle surgery that a lot of the team was worried about, but he is doing well. And someone who just went through something so major—the surgery took 9.5 hours, and because he is amazing and SickKids is magic, he came out of the OR, off the ventilator. His blood pressure is holding. He's being reduced off his meds. He's still on the external pacer. The CPAP machine has been removed, and his toes are pink, which means his heart is working well.

Applause.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Elijah, I can't wait to hold you. I wish I could go down there and see you right now, but I think it's just best that I stay here.

Now, let's get back to this wonderful bill, Bill 282, the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act. I was here in the House just a couple of days ago when the minister came up and took her place and started her comments with the following: that every 14 hours, one person is killed on our highways because of a variety of reasons.

Again, I'm bringing in a northern lens here, Mr. Speaker. It's nice outside, right? Everything is going green. The blooms are coming out and everything. But there's something that I refuse to let this Legislature forget: our winter roads. I am going to bring this and howl at it every single time that I have that opportunity inside this House. When you look at a bill, the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act—what better-fitting title than making that apply to

northern Ontario as well in regard to our roads? Our roads are not being maintained to the level that we expect them to be. The member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay introduced a bill not that long ago, just last year, which would bring Highways 11 and 17 to classification 1, equal to what is on the 400-series highways. That would mean more equipment. That would mean safer roads. That would mean more ability for Ontarians to be getting to and from hospitals, schools, building our economies, because when our roads are closed, we can't go anywhere.

Ask people who live in Hearst. Ask people who live in Beardmore. Ask people who live in White River, the people in Batchawana. From Sault Ste. Marie to Wawa, that highway is constantly closed. And why? Not because things have changed significantly. It snowed in northern Ontario for a very long time. But recently, we have had more road closures and more accidents.

You talk to a community like White River, that was locked in and couldn't get out of their community at all. You talk to a young lady from Manitowadge, Kennedy Quade, who, by a mere 20 seconds—they swerved and her friend Kobe was gone. You talk to a gentleman like Tom Featherstone out of Goulais River, who is absolutely frustrated in regards to the conditions of the roads in the Sault Ste. Marie area and Goulais River area. This is unacceptable. Again, I bring this with a northern lens to the floor of this Legislature.

The other things I want to mention about here: DriveTest services in northern Ontario. My goodness, there's one Ontario; why is it that we cannot get the same services as the rest of this province in northern Ontario as you do everywhere else? We cannot get any DriveTest surveys or inspections done in many of my northern municipalities. DriveTest calls and says, "No, no. There's a snowstorm. It's unsafe. We won't be able to get to your community. We'll postpone it to next month."

Guess what happens the following month? There's another snowstorm. You guessed it, Speaker. That's what happens. That is frustrating. There's no accountability. It's hurting our industries. Larry Lacroix owns a bus business in Chapleau. He is constantly struggling to get his bus drivers certified. It's a constant frustration for many people in northern Ontario.

The other thing that we have in northern Ontario and across this province is insurance costs. The Moving Ontarians More Safely Act—truckers, forestry workers, farming communities: For many of them, the insurance in this province is skyrocketing. Family-run businesses can no longer operate because they cannot find the proper carrier for them in order to get the insurance that they need.

I look at this title, the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act, and there are some things in here that I alluded to in my previous question. In the towing industry, a gentleman that I work out with at my gym—we started talking. He found out I was a local member there. We started chitchatting. He relocated to northern Ontario because of the unsafe industry that is in southern Ontario, and he was happy. I had a chat with him. He says, "When are you guys going to do something?" So, good, we're doing something

here. We're beginning a discussion. There's no disputing that we have to get that done.

The road workers: I have plenty of friends that do a lot of bridge work, that do a lot of highway maintenance. My kids were, at one time, working on highways. So that is, again, another good discussion.

But, as I alluded to a little bit earlier, the e-bikes—in Elliot Lake, I have a very strong population of seniors, I have a very strong population and residents who have mobility issues and challenges.

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This is an opportunity for us to get this right.

What is being proposed right now is going to lead to certain individuals asking, "Am I breaking the law? Is what I'm doing legit? Is it not? How do I know that the purchase I'm going to be making is going to be safe? Is it wise for me to get this particular bike? Is it going to be okay for me to have it in the future? Will I be able to use this at my daughter's—who lives in another municipality—versus in Elliot Lake or on Manitoulin Island?"

These are a lot of the questions, from a northern lens, that people are asking. As I said from the get-go, I will always take my seat and I will always stand on behalf of the good people of Algoma–Manitoulin and bring a northern lens. These are some of the issues that we need—that we were hoping to see in the Moving Ontarians More Safely Act, that I do not see in this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member has indicated that he will share his time with the member from Toronto Centre. So I now turn it over to the member from Toronto Centre.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I really want to thank my colleague the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for sharing his time today. It's certainly a great opportunity to be able to rise in the House and speak about the need for road safety in our community.

I'm quite happy to be standing today, because I'm going to use this as an opportunity to talk about one of the things I'm most passionate about in the entire world, and that's motorsports. A lot of people are often surprised to hear of a young woman in downtown Toronto obsessed with motorsports, but here we are. It has been a big part of my life for about a decade now. One of the reasons it's such an important part of my life is that I came to motorsports through trauma. I was sexually assaulted in my early 20s, and in that moment that I was recovering, I was just getting my driver's licence for the first time, and the speed was something I became addicted to right away. It became an outlet for me, a place I could go and feel safe—locked in my car and learning to find control in my life in a new way.

But I immediately recognized the need to have safe spaces in Ontario to take that speed and get it off of our roads. Organized grassroots motorsports events are safe outlets to go and experience that speed in a safe way.

To all the young people in our communities who have that adrenaline addiction, that need for speed: Keep it off of our public roads. We do not need that. There are amazing local tracks that folks can take advantage of.

Autocross is one of the most accessible, grassroots forms of motorsports you can get into. There are phenomenal local clubs that can help you. And you learn to become a better driver. You learn advanced defensive driving skills and advanced car control, and it's so important.

So my pitch to young people is, if you're interested in that speed, keep it off our public roads. The measures in this bill are going to go a long way to doing that. I really ask people to think seriously about that.

Speaker, I know I probably only have a minute or two left, but the other piece I want to speak to is that as someone connected to the motorsports community—one of the things we've been hearing in the most recent round of lockdowns is that outdoor recreational facilities have been closed. Unfortunately, our local racetracks and autocross clubs haven't been able to run events because, just like the golf clubs, they've been caught up in the closure of these outdoor recreational spaces, and it has been exceptionally hard.

The previous member talked about how we've seen an increase in high speed and stunt driving on our roads as a direct result of COVID-19. I would argue that it's correlated to the fact that our tracks can't open. There's nowhere for people to go and do that safely.

I was quite disappointed when the members opposite voted against the motion to safely reopen outdoor recreational facilities, like our golf clubs, like our racetracks, for example, that would provide a much-needed outlet for folks to take these high speeds, get them off of our public roads and onto our racetracks where they belong, safely. I really hope that we're able to get back to doing that soon.

Speaker, the last thing I wanted to—one minute—work in, as well, because I never get a chance to talk in the House about motorsports, and I could go on and on and on.

Interjections.

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's my only opportunity.

I want to talk about the safety, the role that motorsports plays in—

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: Oh, no.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Hold that thought. When we do reconvene on this particular bill, you will have more time—and then, of course, the question-and-answer afterwards.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Before we get into members' statements, though, I would like to recognize the Minister of Government and Consumer Services on a point of order.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Speaker. I just want to share with the House that I really feel that the member from Toronto Centre should have more time to talk about her passion. I've met up with her in Centralia. The very car she drives to Queen's Park is the car she races, and she does so in a safe environment, in a safe way. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Well, I don't believe that's a point of order. However, having been said already, it's now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Chris Glover: One of the challenges and one of the criticisms that we have of the current government is that they continuously take measures that strip communities and municipalities of the ability to plan the future of their neighbourhoods.

I'll give you some examples: the MZOs. There was an MZO issued on the foundry site, and then, in late January, suddenly, with no warning whatsoever, demolition crews arrived on that site—which is in my colleague from Toronto Centre's riding, and it's a valuable, valuable heritage property—and they began demolition.

The other thing that the government has done is that they've been talking about and negotiating and looking at RFPs on Ontario Place for the last three years, but they haven't been public about it. There has been no public consultation, there has been no public process, and the RFPs, the proposals that were received, were kept secret, so we don't know what the future of Ontario Place is. This is one of the most valuable pieces of property that is owned by the people of Ontario.

The final one I want to mention is the Rail Deck Park. Last week, LPAT ruled in favour of a developer over the city of Toronto over the future of the Rail Deck Park. It was supposed to be a 21-acre green space right in the middle of Toronto, over the train tracks that are over the Union Station tracks, and now it has been scuttled by this government's giving more power to developers through LPAT than to municipalities and local communities. So I'd ask the government to please listen to the communities and listen to municipalities.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Ms. Donna Skelly: As we near the end of the legislative session, I want to take some time to recognize our incredible front-line heroes, our health care heroes. PSWs, doctors, nurses, paramedics deserve to be honoured this week and every week for the selfless work they do in healing and helping others.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have heard stories of front-line workers who have sacrificed their own well-being in an effort to save lives. Many are putting in gruelling hours, often under very stressful conditions. These hard-working men and women are courageous, committed and dedicated to helping those who need it most. They've taken time from their families to be there for their patients.

I know personally how much our front-line workers give of themselves. My sister, Sharen, was a nurse in New Brunswick and in communities across Ontario. She served in Moose Factory, building trust in health care systems among members of our First Nations communities. My aunts Catherine and Helen had worked in hospitals across Ontario, balancing a gruelling nursing career with the obligations of young mothers. My rookie nephew, Liam,

is a paramedic and just helped deliver his very second baby.

By their nature, all of our front-line workers are generally caring and compassionate people. They wouldn't have entered these professions if they weren't. Throughout the pandemic, doctors, PSWs, paramedics, nurses and all front-line health care workers have gone above and beyond in the battle against COVID-19. For these reasons, I want to say I appreciate and am truly grateful for all that you do. Thank you.

OPIOID ABUSE

Ms. Suze Morrison: Speaker, 2,000 people in Ontario died from a fatal opioid overdose last year. These deaths are preventable. My heart goes out to the families and loved ones of those we've lost this year. I can't imagine the pain and the grief that those family members and friends are experiencing.

A study by the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network and data from Toronto Public Health confirm that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of opioid overdose deaths during the pandemic. COVID-19 has contributed to a deadly and volatile drug supply, and it has been devastating for our community.

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The crisis is impacting families across the province and from all walks of life but has claimed the lives of marginalized people to a far greater degree. The number of opioid-related deaths among people who are unhoused more than doubled during the pandemic.

In 2021 this crisis has become even worse. On May 6, there were five fatal suspected overdose-related calls to Toronto Paramedic Services, the highest daily recorded number yet. On May 12, the Moss Park safe injection site in my riding of Toronto Centre reversed 14 potentially deadly overdoses in one day.

The number of opioid-related deaths will continue to increase unless this government takes urgent action. Every day that they ignore this crisis is costing lives. People need help, Speaker. They need access to affordable supportive housing. They need access to treatment options, to harm reduction services and to a safe drug supply.

I'm calling on this government to step up, establish a plan to end the opioid crisis and to save lives.

TREVOR JONES

Mr. Dave Smith: I've stood in this chamber on a number of occasions to speak about some of the exceptional people who have called different communities in my riding of Peterborough-Kawartha home. Today I have the honour of talking about a young gentleman who I'm sure all of Ontario, as well as the entire country of Canada, will come to know by name possibly as early as this summer. Trevor Jones is a 23-year-old young man who hails from the hamlet of Burleigh Falls, about 35 kilometres north of Peterborough on Highway 28.

Trevor is the two-time under-23 world rowing champion in single sculls. Although he is a gifted athlete, his road has not been easy. In 2019 his rowing season was interrupted because of a forearm injury that required surgery to mend compartment syndrome. Then, with the restrictions and cancellations due to COVID, the Olympic qualifiers that were scheduled for 2020 were all postponed when the Olympics in Tokyo were postponed.

Speaker, between May 15 and May 17, an Olympic qualifier for rowing was held in Lucerne, Switzerland. Between injuries and cancellations, it had been almost 18 months since Trevor had been involved in this level of competition, but he rose to the challenge and took home the silver medal, qualifying for the Olympics with a time of seven minutes and 1.48 seconds.

Congratulations, Trevor. All of Ontario is behind you, and good luck in Tokyo.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Sara Singh: I would like to take a moment to thank all of our amazing educators across Peel region, in Brampton Centre and across our beautiful province of Ontario. They have been going above and beyond to keep students engaged throughout this pandemic, finding fun and creative ways to address the COVID and Zoom fatigue that we're all experiencing, but especially our young people, who have been managing a lot of different stressors, many racialized young people not having access to the supports they need to thrive in the current conditions of this pandemic. We know that they've been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 as well.

This is why it is so beautiful to see school board after school board reject hybrid learning models in the province of Ontario. I want to give a big shout-out to our union members at the Elementary Teachers' Federation in Peel and our local school board, who recently also said no to hybrid learning because they understand that fractured learning will have a negative impact on students' outcomes, especially those who are racialized.

What we need this government to do is invest in creating safer classrooms so that we can have a safe return to our schools for students and educators alike. This means improving our ventilation and air filtration systems, investing in smaller class sizes and ensuring that students have every opportunity to succeed.

Speaker, I want to join the chorus of school boards and union members and educators and students and parents who are saying no to hybrid learning and making sure that this government is going to invest to ensure that we have a safe start in September.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'm proud to rise today to highlight the unanimous vote by Guelph city council to support a 32-unit permanent supportive housing project on Willow Road in my riding. This vital project will help Guelph take an important step to achieving our goal to end

homelessness by 2023. I'm proud of Guelph's effort to build partnerships between non-profit organizations and private developers, service providers such as our community health centre, and all levels of government.

Speaker, we need the provincial government to be an active partner to support permanent supportive housing in Guelph and in ridings across the province. No one wants to see the tent encampments that we've seen over the past year or witness the violent confrontation that took place yesterday in Toronto at Lamport Stadium Park.

This province has a housing crisis. People are suffering. The most vulnerable need more than a temporary roof. They need a permanent place to call home and wraparound mental health and addiction support services to stabilize their lives.

As a society, we will be judged on how we treat the most vulnerable.

I believe everyone in this House has an obligation to stand up for permanent supportive housing.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, when the pandemic began, communities everywhere came out to support front-line essential workers. They did it with good reason, and they did it with enthusiasm.

It's now well over a year later, and many front-line workers have been working nearly non-stop. They're ready for a break.

We hear you, we thank you, and your communities still support you.

I want to share just a few recent expressions of that support in Perth–Wellington.

On Saturday, the Downtown Mount Forest Retail Committee held the second annual Chalk Up Mount Forest sidewalk drawing event. It was in honour of Heather Aitken, who passed away from a rare disease. Dozens of driveways were decorated with creative messages honouring Heather and all front-line workers.

Another example: Last week was National Nursing Week and National Police Week. Several local trucking companies took up the cause, contributing to a creative tribute on the side of a transport truck. It featured a photo of a police officer, nurse, doctor, firefighter and a truck driver. Last Wednesday, Arthur-based Ivan Armstrong Trucking parked the trailer at Groves Memorial hospital. It brought front-line workers together and encouraged them to celebrate their work and each other.

Of course, these are just two examples among many.

Whether on a driveway or the side of a truck, the message is clear: Front-line workers matter to all of us. Thank you for your service.

FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, this past week, I've been contacted by emergency room and ICU nurses to talk to me about their wages and their wage negotiations.

The Premier calls these nurses and other front-line health care workers "heroes," and frankly, he's right; they are. Daily, they risk their health, they risk their lives to treat people, and in return, many thousands of them have had to deal with COVID-19 as an illness in their own lives. Four of them have died.

But how does the government treat these heroes? If anything shows that those words mean nothing, or less, it's the government's wage suppression bill, Bill 124. This bill keeps any wage increase below the rate of inflation for these nurses and for these health care workers. Seriously, these nurses who are risking their lives and dying are being told by this government that they can't negotiate a decent wage increase.

Speaker, we need to treat nurses and other health care workers like the heroes that they are. Bill 124 needs to be thrown out, and we need to be able to negotiate decent wages for people who risk their lives.

CROSSFIT COBOURG

Mr. David Piccini: Speaker, it's wonderful to rise today to shine a light on an amazing partnership I recently became aware of in Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Over the last 14 months, as we've spent more time on the screens, as we watch daily newscasts that, every day, talk about case counts, ICU admissions, we often don't take enough time to talk about the positives—the positives of businesses pivoting in response to COVID-19, teachers and students who have been responsive and pivoting to online learning. The students' routines have changed, which, as we know, has had an affect on their mental health and well-being.

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What do these two examples have in common, you might ask, Speaker? Let me tell you about Laurie Kerr, a grade 7/8 teacher at Grafton Public School. She has had students in the free virtual workouts offered by CrossFit Cobourg. This is a truly creative partnership with a local small business that benefits students, their mental health and their physical well-being.

CrossFit Cobourg's goal is to empower and support our community. They're doing just that. At the helm are two great young guys in far better shape than me, Bud Tinney and Scott Carreira. Their virtual workouts are accessible for all ages and all levels of fitness. They've been helping people stay fit through this COVID-19 global pandemic and they've been doing a phenomenal job. This partnership is a great experience for students to interact with their community and to get outside.

We as a community are stronger together. Thank you, Ms. Kerr, for your creativity and thinking outside the box. Thank you to Bud Tinney, someone I've come to know through this pandemic, for offering these virtual workouts at no cost to community members, including our students.

What a great community we have in these grade 7/8 students Grafton Public School—yet another example of a small-town community coming together through these difficult times.

STRAY CURRENT

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Earlier this month, I was pleased that my motion to create a working group to examine the issues surrounding stray current and to provide recommendations surrounding the best practices to protect livestock and people from stray current passed unanimously.

I brought this motion forward for many reasons. First of all, I just wanted to recognize the advocacy of Chatham farmer Lee Montgomery, who has done lots of work over the decades attempting to eliminate stray current on farms throughout Ontario. I've always been a safety advocate, as I previously put forth a stray current bill back in my days in opposition, but, sadly, my bill died on the order table as the Liberal government of the day did not see the value in allowing my bill to go to committee, despite passing second reading.

Now, as the MPP for Chatham-Kent–Leamington, I strive to do the right thing. Thomas Edison, known as the father of electricity, also mandated that return currents be returned to the source through a wire capable of handling such loads and never be returned to the source through the ground because of the negative impact on living creatures. Stray current causes livestock to experience health issues such as mastitis, foot rot, open sores, miscarriages and even death, resulting in huge financial losses for farmers.

Through the creation of an experienced expert working group, it is my hope that our group will create an ethical and agreeable approach to eliminating stray current problems that have adversely affected livestock and people throughout Ontario for decades.

REPORT, OMBUDSMAN OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following document has been tabled: a report entitled Oversight 911: Investigation into How the Ministry of Health Oversees Patient Complaints and Incident Reports about Ambulance Services, from the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario.

COVID-19 DEATHS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the Leader of the Opposition has a point of order she wishes to raise.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you very kindly, Speaker. I seek the unanimous consent for the House to observe a moment of silence for the 151 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 over the past week.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House for a moment's silence for the 151 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 over the past week. Agreed? Agreed.

Members will please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Members, please take your seats.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is for the Premier. Earlier this week the Premier and his MPPs, against all science and health advice, voted against our motion to reopen outdoor amenities safely. Can the Premier confirm that he is now going to go back on his decision and lift the restrictions that he imposed on outdoor activities notwithstanding the fact that every credible expert begged him not to do so?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

To reply, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the leader of the official opposition that we have encouraged people to be outdoors. The weather is great now. We encourage people to be outdoors, to go to the parks. The parks are all open. Go for a walk, go for a bike ride, go for a run. Get outside and get some exercise. We know that's important for people's physical and mental well-being. We have not strayed from that. We have always encouraged people to be outdoors this time of the year.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: This government has a terrible record on reopening. We'll remember, back in the fall, they brought forward their colour-coded framework in which the metrics that they utilized were four times higher than what the experts recommended.

Back in February, the science table predicted that if the government rushed the reopening and didn't put in place extra public health precautions, we would be in a very terrible situation. They predicted disaster. Lo and behold, the Premier ignored their advice and walked us right into this brutal third wave.

In April, the Premier decided to close playgrounds and bring a police state into Ontario instead of giving us paid sick days for our essential workers. That's not what the science table recommended.

Now, apparently, there's been another marathon cabinet battle under way. Will this Premier commit this time to not rely on buddies and lobbyists and stakeholders in his decision-making but actually listen to the science?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Since the beginning of this pandemic, our government's top priority has been the health and well-being of the people of Ontario. Since the arrival of the more transmissible variants to the province—which was, actually, what did lead to the third wave—we've continued to take the necessary actions to control the spread.

We continue to rely on the advice and recommendations of our Chief Medical Officer of Health, our public health measures table and many other medical experts, to review the science and the data and the clinical evidence to provide us with advice and recommendations on when we can safely start to reopen the province, when the time

is right. Because there are many factors that need to be considered, including the numbers of the cases that we're seeing in the province; what's happening with hospitalization, new hospitalizations as well as ICU rates; the R rate; public health system capacity; and, of course, the rate of vaccinations—which are going extremely well. We've now vaccinated over 7.5 million people in the province of Ontario. That's very good news.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the problem is, they don't take the experts' advice. They don't take the advice. We cannot get this wrong again. It is important to get it right. Parents want their kids back in schools. Working people want to be safely back on the job. Front-line health-care workers need relief, not a fourth wave to deal with. Businesses need certainty so that they can reopen for good and start hiring people again. Everybody wants to see public health ahead of politics.

Speaker, the Premier has messed it up three times, costing us jobs, costing lives, costing businesses. We don't trust them. Nobody trusts this government to get it right. Will he commit today to base his plan on the expert advice and make sure that he makes that advice public? Because nobody trusts this Premier. Nobody has confidence that he'll get it right this time.

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Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say that of course we are relying on the medical advice and the scientific advice that we're receiving from the experts. They will be the ones that will advise us when it will be safe to start gradually reopening things. We know that has to be done on a very gradual basis because of the variants of concern, in particular. More information will be coming forward on that very, very soon.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. I have to say that people are relieved that the announcement came that the surgeries are going to start being booked again. That is really great. It can't happen soon enough, as we all know. In fact, in the National Post there was a report that said this: "Soon-to-be-published data indicates that twice as many Ontarians with heart ailments passed away waiting for surgery during the pandemic than before COVID-19 hit."

My question to the Premier is: Can he tell us how long he expects people to have to wait, and how many Ontarians have already passed away while waiting for their surgeries?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government is certainly well aware that many people are very anxious, wanting to have their surgeries that have been postponed done as soon as possible, and to have their diagnostic procedures done as well. We know that there are many people that have had their lives put on hold for a period of time because of the

variants, because of the surge in cases that we've seen that have required hospitalization of many, many people with the COVID variants. However, we have already put significant amounts of money into dealing with the backlog: \$500 million from last fall to the most recent budget; \$500 million will certainly help.

But I think it's also important to note that in 2020-21, the average Ontario hospital completed 88% of their total surgical allocation, and that since the beginning of this pandemic, there have been already over 430,000 scheduled surgeries done, and more to be done now with the reissuance of the amendment to directive number 2.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With all due respect, people haven't only had to put their lives on hold; people have lost their lives while they've been on hold. The FAO estimates, as everybody knows, that there will be 419,000 surgeries and procedures backlogged by September, and it will take three and a half years to clear that backlog. It didn't have to be this way.

In British Columbia, they started last summer to try to reduce the backlog and get those surgeries and procedures dealt with and they entered the third wave of this pandemic with 95% of their backlog cleared. That didn't happen in Ontario. Ontario did nothing in that regard, and now we're further behind than ever. Even worse, this government tabled a budget that had less than half of the necessary funding to clear the backlog.

My question is, when will we see a plan that has clear benchmarks and the appropriate funding to clear the surgical and procedural backlog?

Hon. Christine Elliott: The situation in BC can't be compared to the situation in Ontario, because it's important to point out that the percentage of procedures completed in BC represents the patients who were on surgical wait-lists when the ramp-down in March 2020 began and had their surgeries delayed. It does not account for patients that would have been added to wait-lists in that time period if there had not been a ramp-down. So that is not even applicable to Ontario.

But with respect to what is happening in Ontario, we have invested over \$283 million to support additional priority surgeries, including cardiac, cancer, orthopaedic and cataract surgeries. We've extended diagnostic imaging hours at health care facilities for MRI, CT scans and other tests. We've invested more than \$351 million for more than 2,250 new beds at 57 hospitals. We've also initiated a surgical wait-list and surgical smoothing program to make sure that we can help people as quickly as possible, and we have invested the money in order to be able to do that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: People are suffering, and they can't wait indefinitely for this government to put a plan together.

Dr. Harindra Wijesundera, a Sunnybrook cardiologist, says this: "I have lost a lot of patients on the wait-list ... Those patients and their families deserve recognition that

they are victims of this pandemic, too.” Patients are literally losing their lives while waiting for delayed surgeries.

Speaker, my question to the Premier is this: Without significant investment and a serious plan to eliminate the backlog, patients desperate for surgery are going to be left suffering and at increasing risk. When will we see the plan and the funding?

Hon. Christine Elliott: There is a plan and there is the funding, as I’ve just indicated to you—\$500 million to start—in order to be able to move forward with the diagnostic procedures as well as the surgeries. This has been organized for some time. We’ve been working through it. We were able to do many of the surgeries and procedures before the third wave hit us, and we are looking to do that as much as we can now. Dr. Williams and the medical experts, as well as people in our government, have been looking at the lists on a daily basis to see when we can amend directive number 2.

You’re right. It’s great that it’s happened. We’ll be able to start with the ambulatory procedures and day procedures, as soon as now, in some hospitals, as long as they’re able to follow the guidelines and rules set out by Ontario Health. That is very good news, and we know that people are anxious to have their surgeries done or procedures done, and we are going to move through them as quickly as possible.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Sara Singh: My question is for the Premier. This morning, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a new report that calls on this government to commit to ending private, for-profit long-term care in Ontario. The report notes that the main focus for private long-term-care operators is making a profit for themselves and their shareholders, and they’re willing to cut corners if that means bigger profits for them. We’ve seen this clearly throughout the pandemic with many homes withholding PPE and not paying their PSWs and front-line workers a livable wage.

The main focus of anyone in senior care should be making sure seniors are safe and healthy, but that’s not what’s happening here in Ontario. That’s why the COVID-19 death rate in for-profit homes was twice the rate of non-profit homes and five times the rate of publicly owned homes, Speaker.

My question, through you, to the Premier: Will the Conservatives let this report and recommendations sit on the shelf yet again, like all the other advice they’ve been given, or will they take responsibility, take action and take the profit out of long-term care?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Of course, we started taking action from day one when we were elected, Mr. Speaker. We didn’t need reports to tell us that we needed to make some significant investments into long-term care. That is why we started immediately, back in 2018, to build long-term-care beds. Look, I’ve said it on a number of

occasions: The fact that the previous Liberal administration only built some 600 beds over the time that they were in office is completely unacceptable. There were four previous Liberal administrations that did nothing to build out long-term care, did nothing refurbish some of the older homes, did nothing for a staffing strategy.

What we’re doing is putting 2,000 new nurses in the stream, 27,000 new PSWs, 30,000 additional spaces. This is an incredible step on our way to ensuring that every resident of long-term care gets four hours of care; a North American-leading level of care. We’re well on our way to the best system in North America, and I hope that the members opposite will support us on that.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, it’s not just New Democrats and everyday Ontarians who are calling for an end to for-profit, big-corporate long-term care, a clear legacy of the Liberal governments and Conservative governments, as well; it’s senators, lawyers, public health and policy experts, economists, just to name a few. They all agree that phasing out for-profit long-term care isn’t just the right thing to do; it’s essential to the well-being of our seniors and the health of our long-term-care system here in Ontario.

Again to the Premier: Will you take the advice of these experts, listen to them and the data, and commit to taking the profit out of long-term care?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I’m not going to take the advice of the members opposite, who are suggesting that we remove thousands of beds from the system. That’s just simply not going to happen. I’m not certain what the members opposite don’t understand.

1050

We are not going to reduce the amount of long-term care available to the people of the province of Ontario like the member is suggesting. We’re going to increase it by 30,000 spaces, because we know we need to. We’re not going to reduce the amount of care in long-term-care homes. We’re going to increase it—four hours of care—which is why we’re hiring some 27,000 additional PSWs. That’s why we’re bringing on 2,000 additional nurses.

So very clearly, to the member opposite: No, I am not going to listen to you. I am not going to reduce the amount of long-term-care beds. I am not going to reduce the amount of nurses. I am not going to reduce the amount of PSWs. I am not going to reduce the amount of care. I’m going to do just the opposite, as all of the members on this side of the House are committed to doing. We’re going to get this right, Mr. Speaker, because it’s been too long and it’s been ignored for too long.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Donna Skelly: A major priority for our Premier, for our health minister and for this government has been getting needles into arms. As of today, as the minister just mentioned, over 7.5 million Ontario adults have received their first dose.

Ensuring that millions of people can get their vaccine is simply no small feat. This government has worked diligently to create a robust online platform and call centre to manage the demand for vaccines.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Government and Consumer Services provide some insight into the work that has gone on behind the scenes to enable more than 7.5 million Ontarians to receive a vaccine?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I would like to thank the hard-working member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for that important question. I would like to share in the House that I routinely refer to the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services as the machinery of government, and they have not failed us when it comes to making appointments for vaccine bookings.

When you couple our effective call centre with the online booking that was stood up by the Ministry of Health, we have an amazing one-two punch when it comes to accessing vaccines.

For example, just two weeks ago, on May 3, when the 18-and-older cohort in hot spot regions were allowed to start making their appointments, we had a record-breaking day. At that time, we accommodated, through the online portal and our call centre, 420,000 appointments. And the very next day, we also accommodated almost 300,000 appointments again.

So, what I would like to share with everyone in the House: When you pull our call centre together with our online booking, we have one of the best systems in North America.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Minister. I know Ontarians are reassured to hear that our call centre is here to help all of those who are eligible and want a vaccine to actually get one.

Our call centre offers support in over 300 languages. Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if you know this, but Ontario is among the first, if not the first, jurisdiction to offer live translation services for vaccine booking—

Interjection.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Yes, that's correct—the first.

With the tremendous interest and volume our call centres have experienced, there have also been key days when wait times cannot be avoided. Can the Minister of Government and Consumer Services shed some light on what patterns she is seeing, and what Ontarians can expect when they call for support?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very proud to share with everyone that, when you take into consideration our unique, live, real-time translation in 300 languages, when you think about the hundreds of agents that we have available to book appointments through our call centre, and when you also marry that with our effective online portal, we are one of the best in North America when it comes to booking vaccines.

I have to tell you that, while there sometimes is a wait time, that's good news because it shows that there are hundreds of thousands of people who want to help Ontario

move forward by getting their vaccines. Speaker, I am really pleased to share with you that the average time in booking an appointment is less than seven minutes.

Just earlier this week, my mom sent me a note. On Monday, she got notification from the Huron-Perth health unit that she could book her second appointment. I also heard from an individual who had 22,999 people ahead of him on Tuesday morning that he booked his appointment for Sunday. Speaker, we have one of the best appointment booking systems in North America, and thank you—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Students and their families are worn down after another five weeks, and in some cases even longer, of emergency remote learning. They are missing their friends and their teachers, and they are watching very anxiously as the end of the year approaches and there is a possibility that they're going to have another Zoom chat replace their graduations.

Speaker, this government refused to do what was necessary to keep schools safely open because they just didn't want to spend the money. They refused to listen to the experts when they closed the playgrounds and the soccer fields. We don't even know at this moment how many education workers have been vaccinated, which is a key part of reopening schools.

Is the Premier going to come forward with any kind of plan to salvage this school year, or is the real plan to keep kids in online learning permanently?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're going to continue to follow the best expert advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, as we have done throughout the pandemic. I know the members opposite did not vote for his continuation and give confidence to our lead medical officer, but on this side of the House we believe in following his advice, and that's why we have done so since the beginning. It's why Ontario has one of the lowest case rates for children under the age of 20 in the nation, because we invested \$1.6 billion, put every intervention possible within our schools, from improving air ventilation to the supplying of three-ply quality mask PPE to cohorting students to increase screening, asymptomatic testing—the only province that has that type of capacity within all regions of the province. We've done that following the advice; we're going to continue to do that.

Obviously we know how important it is to keep schools open. While we have done so throughout the year, our aim is to follow the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, because we do not want to put at risk the recovery that we now finally see on the horizon.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, what's clear, I think, from a response like that is that this government is wiping its

hands of this school year and of our students across this province. This Premier isn't serious about safely reopening schools because he's too focused on saving money by keeping our kids permanently online. That is their plan. They've made it very clear.

Teachers, education workers, school boards, pediatricians, parents and mental health advocates are all saying the same thing: Online learning is harming our kids. We should be investing now in reopening our schools. The Public School Boards' Association has said the government's plan "may be promoting the online learning option to the detriment of student well-being and the overall integrity of our education system."

Why? With the mounting evidence and growing backlash, why won't this government drop this terrible plan?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is ironic coming from members opposite, who have stood with the teacher unions to keep schools closed throughout 2021. In fact, it was the members opposite who said schools should remain closed so long as the stay-at-home order remains in place. They would have kept schools closed, they would have taken away choice from parents and they would have undermined the learning quality kids in this province deserve.

The Premier provided \$1.6 billion—more than any province; more than the New Democrats in British Columbia—more funding for mental health than any province, a 400% increase over when the former Liberals were in power. We have followed the advice. We have put in place cohorting, asymptomatic testing, stricter screening of kids. We have ensured busing transportation has been improved. We have ensured cleaning is enhanced within our schools. We did all that, leading us to one of the lowest rates of cases for youth—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Nothing. You failed.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Let the minister complete his answer.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We have put those dollars in place. That has led us to one of the lowest case rates of youth under 20 in Canada, because we followed the advice.

We want to keep schools open and we want kids in school; it must be safe. We are following the best advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, as we have done throughout this pandemic, and we will continue to do so in the interests of students in Ontario.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. On November 3 of last year, the Premier released a colour-coded reopening plan that was immediately rejected by scientists and public health experts.

On February 11, the Premier was advised that if he reopened too early, we would have a disaster. Well, the Premier reopened too early and we had a catastrophic third wave.

On April 16, the Premier brought in carding and closed playgrounds. Scientists immediately said, "This is not what we are recommending."

Speaker, will the Premier commit today to a reopening plan, supported by the science advisory table with clear and transparent key indicators for when it is safe to reopen schools, communities and businesses for outdoor and indoor service?

1100

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: First, let me be clear: It's the arrival of the more transmissible variants that actually led to the third wave that we're dealing with the higher rates, and that is why we've been calling on the federal government to do something about that, because that is how the variants came in. However, since we have implemented the stay-at-home order, we're also looking at how we may safely exit it when the time is right.

You're absolutely right. We need to do this slowly and carefully, and there needs to be a plan, which is being developed, which is based on the scientific advice and the medical advice that we received from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the public health table, as well as other medical experts. It is based on looking at outdoor activities first, indoor activity later, but there will more information that will be coming forward with respect to this imminently.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, with all due respect to the minister, and I have the utmost respect for this minister, the government has not followed the advice of the science advisory table time and time again. This is a matter of public confidence and trust. The only way we are going to combat COVID and get this pandemic behind us is if the public is onside.

So I am pleading with the government today: Follow the advice of the science advisory table, have clear indicators, be transparent with the people of Ontario what the science advisory table is telling them and give businesses time to plan. No more flip-flopping. Will the government commit to doing that today, Speaker?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I appreciate the question from the member, and I can advise the member opposite that we are relying on the medical advice that we're receiving from the science advisory table—that's one group—the public health measures table, the chief medical officer's advice and other medical experts. They are certainly providing us with guidance on when and how things can be opened when the time is right, because there are many factors, of course, that need to be considered: the rates of vaccination, which are going very well, with over 7.5 million vaccines already administered, but it's also dealing with the numbers of new hospitalizations, the numbers of people who are in intensive care units, the R rate, the public health system capacity.

There are a variety of factors that must be considered, but I can certainly assure the member, through you, Mr. Speaker, that we are listening to the medical experts; we are following their clinical advice and recommendations. There will be a plan, which will be released imminently.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Dave Smith: My question is for the Minister of Finance. As we head into the second summer of this pandemic, all of the members in this chamber have seen and heard how hard the effects of COVID-19 have been on Ontario's small businesses. We also know how the recovery of these small businesses is critical to the recovery of our communities as we lay the groundwork to rebuild Ontario better in the wake of this pandemic. That's why I was happy to hear from a number of small businesses in my community, who were in dire need of financial support, that they received the second instalment of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant.

Could the minister tell us more about how the government is supporting Ontario's small businesses at this time and elaborate on what new supports have been made available to small businesses?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Willowdale and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to the member. I know he cares deeply about small businesses that have been impacted greatly by COVID-19. Our government has been working with those businesses for the last 14 months, from the beginning of this pandemic, providing over \$23 billion to protect our jobs and our economy. In our most recent budget 2021, our government set aside \$100 million for an Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant to help the tourism industry reclaim its place as an economic powerhouse job creator in our province.

Applications are now open for the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant, which will provide one-time payments of \$10,000 to \$20,000 to eligible small businesses in the tourism and travel sector. Each small business owner can use that money to support whatever they feel is best. Whether that is paying the wages or keeping the doors open, again business owners understand their needs best.

So I encourage everyone to visit ontario.ca/covidsupport for further eligibility details. Please apply. I think all members in this House have a responsibility to help businesses apply, and that deadline will be open until June 21, 2021.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that answer. It's great news that the government is supporting hard-hit small businesses in so many ways. As the minister knows, some of the hardest-hit small businesses in this pandemic are in Ontario's vital tourism sector. Specifically, in my riding, we have had 33 years of summer Musicfest. That is in jeopardy of not going on. The revenue that that generates for our community, the spill-off in tourism, is absolutely fantastic. Could the minister tell us how the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant fits into the government's plan to rebuild a healthy economy?

Mr. Stan Cho: It's an important question. I would like to correct my record: That grant application program will be open until June 25, 2021. I just misspoke there.

Our government is going to continue to do our best to support this hard-hit sector. We've been doing that from the beginning. The Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries has hosted 15 town halls since the start of this pandemic, advocated for the industry at the jobs and recovery committee, created 14 ministerial advisory committees and created the tourism task force.

On Thursday, May 13, the minister announced the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Grant program and hosted three briefings throughout the day: one for the stakeholders in the tourism and travel industry, where close to 1,000 stakeholders were invited and hundreds showed up; one for the government MPPs; and one for the opposition—to the two members who actually showed up for that town hall, I want to thank you for putting politics below your constituents; your constituents are more important. On a personal note, I want to thank you and let you know that I have deep respect for you and this chamber.

Thank you again for supporting small businesses. Our government is continuing to do—

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

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Ms. Suze Morrison: The hard-working personal support workers in the province are exploited, underpaid and overworked. Many of these workers are immigrant and racialized women, and for over a year they have worked on the front lines of this pandemic, putting their lives at risk to care for the seniors of the province.

I recently spoke with Connie, a PSW in my riding in Toronto Centre. She has worked throughout the pandemic, caring for seniors in their homes. Her hours fluctuate significantly and she doesn't have benefits, and while she receives pandemic pay, it only applies for the time she's scheduled to care for residents, which sometimes can be as little as three hours a day.

PSW pandemic pay wage enhancements are set to expire at the end of June. Connie and other PSWs across the province are demanding a permanent pay raise. Will this government listen and give personal support workers the pay increase and full-time jobs that they deserve?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member for the question. We certainly also value the incredible work that personal support workers have done throughout the pandemic. They have been there in our long-term-care homes, in our hospitals, in home and community care. We know that there are issues relating to their wages. That's why we have provided this temporary support that's running to the end of June.

But during that time, we're also looking at some of the other issues that personal support workers are concerned about: not having full-time jobs; in some situations, not having benefits; not being paid for some of the additional work they do; the travelling time; all the other issues that we're concerned about. We want PSWs to stay in the

system. We know that many leave after their first year because it's not the job that they expected it to be, so we want to work that into their training and education as well.

So, in short, there are many issues that need to be dealt with to keep our personal support workers and retain them in our system, and we are working on just that, in addition to the pay requirements.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: Respectfully, back to the minister: If you want to keep the PSWs in our system and keep them in your jobs, the answer is simple. You need to just pay them more and give them permanent, full-time work.

PSWs are essential, and they deserve to be treated with respect. Connie, the PSW working in my riding, told me that the seniors that she visits depend on her. She is paid for only one hour each visit to provide the most basic of care, like helping them go to the washroom, bathing them, preparing food. It is impossible to rush this kind of care in an hour. Ultimately, she ends up volunteering her time, because she can't stand to leave these seniors without the help that they need.

1110

Our seniors deserve the highest-quality care and the workers who care for them deserve a decent, livable wage and full-time careers. When is this government going to step up, do the right thing and properly pay PSWs in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Christine Elliott: In the question that the member asked, Speaker, through you to the member, she indicated that there are other issues in addition to the pay issue. There's the timing issue. There's the travelling issue. There's the trying to put groups of people together so that there's not huge travel time involved in it, and making sure that people are paid for the work that they do and that they don't have to volunteer.

But we also know that there are other issues. We are looking at the bill that's just been put forward in the Legislature to regulate personal health workers to make sure that they have certain standards that they need to conform to. They want that. We are doing that because we also recognize that's important for them, but it's also important for the very vulnerable people that personal support workers care for: children, seniors, people with disabilities.

We are looking at all of these issues to make sure that when someone goes through and is trained as a personal support worker, they want to stay and they want to continue to do this work. They are really the linchpins in home care; I certainly would agree with the member. They are the ones who know the family. They know all the issues related to what's going on. So we want to encourage them and we want them to stay—

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

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

M^{me} Lucille Collard: My question is to the Minister of Education. Last night we had an incredibly important

conversation in this House on making the education system more equitable through Bill 287. Few members were here. I want to thank my colleagues in the opposition who shared their important and moving personal stories, as well for their constructive feedback.

It was extremely disappointing that the government came to the debate with their minds made up, believing that they are already doing enough to fight racism in the education system. It is unacceptable to refer to any action on systemic discrimination as “counterproductive.” There can never be enough done as long as systemic barriers still exist.

To the minister: Why won't the government work with all members of this House to implement Bill 287 when it has the potential to improve the education system even further?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we are very much committed to breaking down barriers that impede the success of students, particularly racialized, Indigenous and underrepresented young people in the province of Ontario.

Respectfully, the former Liberal government had 15 years to advance equity in education, and they did not. Today they bring forth a private member's bill, whereas this government since day one has brought forth transformation. We are the government—unlike the former Liberals, respectfully—that is destreaming the grade 9 math curriculum. We are following the best advice by limiting discretionary suspensions of young kids disproportionately impacting Black and racialized children and special education children.

We are the government that mandated professional development on all elected trustees—public and Catholic, English and French—and all school board administrators when it comes to human rights training. We're the government that ensured that students see themselves reflected in their educators, by abolishing a regulation that removed the ability of principals to hire based on equity, on diversity and on merit in Ontario.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: Growing up in Orléans, my community wasn't the most diverse place. In a high school of 1,600 students, I can count on maybe two hands the families of children who came from non-white backgrounds. But we didn't talk about it. It wasn't something that was discussed in school and we didn't talk about it as friends. As a result, that lack of understanding and that lack of vocabulary to talk about these issues remains with me to this day, Mr. Speaker.

We need to ensure that our children are exposed to more understanding of where we are as a society today and how we got here. Sometimes understanding that history is going to be difficult, it's going to be hard and it's going to be uncomfortable. But it's important to do, Mr. Speaker. If we don't do it, we're leading our children to a great disservice.

I'll ask the Minister of Education again: Why won't his government support Bill 287 and ensure that our children get the understanding, education and conversation they need and they deserve?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If the member opposite's thesis to the House is that we need to better reflect society and diversity, then how could the member opposite be associated with a political party that allowed hiring of educators in Ontario singularly on their seniority, not based on their ethno-cultural backgrounds, so that we could have, for example, in Peel region, where I had to call—the first time in history that a government called in a supervisor for the purpose of—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Ottawa South, come to order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —racism. That did not happen under your watch, respectfully. You had the chance to take action in Peel, and you failed them.

We acted because we believe we have to fight discrimination in all of its forms. If we believe in the principle of making sure that the people who inspire our kids reflect the communities our schools are in, then we should be supporting efforts like the elimination of regulation 274 that ensure the best candidate, diverse candidates are the ones who lead instruction in our classrooms. That is just good government. We're going to continue—

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

BORDER SECURITY

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

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker. My—
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

The member for Northumberland–Peterborough South.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker. I apologize. It was just an urgent email from a constituent. I apologize if I offended the leader opposite.

Speaker, we know that during these difficult times, a permeable border is a danger when it comes to the spread of the dangerous COVID-19 variants. These variants of concern are real, and they have entered Ontario.

This government has made additional investments to contact tracing, additional investments to our hospitals, additional investments to support with IPAC measures, additional investments to support our schools. We continue this very real fight against COVID-19 so that we can put it beyond us and get back our lives.

Our cousin nations around the world, in part of their COVID-19 response, have implemented strict border measures.

I recently learned that the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has come under fire for not restricting travel to the United Kingdom from international hot spots sooner.

Can the Solicitor General please update the House on any lessons learned from the UK experience and what more would be relevant?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South.

He's absolutely right: Dangerous COVID-19 variants came to Ontario from outside our borders. The B117 variant was first identified in the UK; the B1351 variant was first identified in South Africa; the P1 was from Brazil; and the B1617 was first identified in India. These variants are still active in our communities, and more of them can appear in the future if the federal government refuses to act quickly.

We don't want dangerous variants to run rampant in Ontario and create a fourth wave. That is why we want to ensure that the federal government does their job, locks down the borders, protects our communities, and makes sure that we aren't facing a fourth wave because of these variants of concern.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. David Piccini: My supplemental, back to the minister: I know that vaccines play an important role in stopping the spread and an important role in returning our lives back to normal.

We continue to set daily records in the number of vaccines administered and doses in arms. Given the great success of our vaccine campaign to date, no one wants to see that effort go to waste due to emergent variants that slip through our borders. All everyone wants is a safe and normal summer. I think to the many activities I look forward to, hopefully, getting back to in my riding of Northumberland–Peterborough South.

We know Ontarians have done their part in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19, and they expect their government to do so the same.

My question back to the Solicitor General: Are there concrete examples of how Ontarians have reduced their mobility during this pandemic, and what more we can do to help stop the spread COVID-19?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you to the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South.

I'm very glad that we are engaging in this conversation, because people need to understand that what they have been doing is making a difference.

For example, Highway 401 between the 400 and Keele Street, which remains an important artery for supply chain, has nonetheless seen traffic decrease by 25% when compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Given the sacrifices that Ontarians have made over many months, it's time for the federal government to match that effort with action of their own. After all, we're all in this together, and we need to co-operate.

Unfortunately, thus far, our plea to protect Ontarians continues to be ignored by the federal government. It is deeply disturbing to see how many pathways people are coming in and carrying the variants of concern while we are dealing with high ICU rates and hospitalization rates. The federal government needs to act now.

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AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. On

behalf of my constituents, I've put forward a series of questions to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, and we asked specific questions about whether there would be an appeals process: what the success markers of a pilot program are, whether clinicians would get the final say or whether it would be a care coordinator who has no clinical expertise, what criteria the ministry used to determine invitations to the pilot OAP program—very specific questions, you see, Speaker. So, of course, these families feel like it was a slap in the face when the ministry essentially copied and pasted the same non-answer in response.

Will this government commit to transparency to these families and finally answer these questions?

Hon. Todd Smith: I'm really proud of the job that our government has been doing on the new Ontario Autism Program and all the work that's been put into it by our volunteer clinicians and researchers and community advocates and those with lived experience over the last year. The work on that Ontario Autism Program is well under way, and I'm really pleased to say that the first 600 children have been accepted into the new needs-based program. We'll be working with those children and their families over the next month or so before expanding to a far greater number of children across the province.

I think it's really important to add that when we made this announcement earlier this spring or back in the winter, we talked about the fact that we've invested twice the amount of money that was in the previous program from the Liberal government, \$300 million more, to a grand total of \$600 million. We'll be spending that, and every child in the province is continuing to receive funding from the government that's far more than the pitiful numbers from the previous Liberal government when they were in charge.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, while I appreciate the response, that hasn't really answered the questions that the families are actually looking for answers to. So I'll ask again.

For over two years, these kids have been waiting for service. For over two years, these families have been given no information, no stable funding, no program—in fact, under this government, capacity has decreased. Kids have been denied much-needed therapies and families have been forced to go further into debt to support their kids. Families tell me that the lack of transparency and the blind disregard for the information that they need is unconscionable.

Will the minister finally answer these parents' valid questions and confirm whether clinicians have the final say, that there will be an appeals process, what criteria was used to invite families into the OAP pilot program, and what the success markers for the program are? Minister, please be clear and give the parents the respect they deserve and answer the questions that I asked your ministry.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thank you for the opportunity to answer some of these questions. I can confirm that more

than 34,000 families are receiving support through their existing behaviour plans, childhood budgets and interim one-time funding, as we continue to implement the new needs-based program. For those families, they have been assessed by a care coordinator, and clinicians are going to be working with those families all the way through the process. That's why we've started with 600 families in this Ontario Autism Program—a needs-based program—to ensure that we get this right before expanding the program.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have to tell anyone in this Legislature that mistakes have been made on this file dating back to the early 2000s. We've taken the time to work with clinicians, researchers, experts, family members and those with lived experience to get this right once and for all. We're on our way. We are going to have the best program in the entire country.

IMMUNISATION CONTRE LA COVID-19

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé. Les travailleurs essentiels du commerce du détail sont maintenant éligibles à la vaccination pour les 18 ans et plus. Cependant, des personnes importantes ont été exclues de ce groupe.

Une grande proportion des travailleurs et travailleuses dans nos épiceries sont des adolescents âgés de 16 et 17 ans. Ma fille de 16 ans travaille dans une épicerie, dans un quartier à haut risque, depuis plusieurs mois. Elle me dit que tous les autres caissiers et caissières sont de son âge.

Jean-François, un parent de cinq enfants à Toronto, m'a contacté pour me dire que toute la famille a été atteinte de la COVID. Sa fille de 16 ans travaille aussi dans une épicerie.

Monsieur le Président, ces jeunes sont des travailleurs essentiels au même titre que les autres, mais ils ne sont toujours pas une priorité pour la vaccination. Ma question est : qu'est-ce que je dis à tous ces adolescents qui doivent trop souvent supporter la frustration des clients épuisés par la situation mais qui continuent de travailler pour nous servir?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you for the question. We do have a vaccine rollout plan that is divided into three phases. We are into phase 2 right now, and we are looking at the first essential workers group, people who are not able to work from home. There are many people who fall into this category. We are now getting into the category of people who are doing work like grocery store clerks, front-line clerks and people who are doing customer service. All of those issues are being taken into consideration.

We want to make sure that we can continue with this rollout. We now can vaccinate 12- to 17-year-olds, as you're aware. This is starting via our booking agency as of May 31, but people can still go and make appointments to be vaccinated otherwise.

We want to make sure that everyone in Ontario who wants to receive a vaccine will be able to receive a vaccine, and we are working though that list of essential workers now.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: My supplemental is for the Minister of Health. There's been a lot of talk about front-line workers this past year: how important they are, how undervalued and underappreciated they are. The pandemic has opened our eyes to the valuable and essential role they play in our communities.

What seems to have gone unnoticed is the critical role that teenagers play in this workforce. Students who pour the Premier's coffee in the morning and make his real egg sandwich at Tim Hortons need and deserve to be vaccinated, and yet the coffee and the sandwich have received more of the Premier's attention than these critical workers.

The students in Orléans who are stocking shelves at the grocery store, pouring coffee at Tim Hortons or working at a pharmacy deserve and need to be prioritized for vaccinations, Mr. Speaker. You would have thought the government would have done it when vaccines were authorized for children most recently, but that hasn't happened.

My question to the minister is, when are teenagers who work on the front lines, who are pouring coffee and stocking shelves and working in grocery stores, going to be prioritized for vaccines?

Hon. Christine Elliott: They have been prioritized for vaccines. We've already made the vaccines available. The Pfizer vaccines will be available for 12- to 17-year-olds, including the teenagers you're speaking about. They are not able to work from home, obviously. They will be able to book their appointments online via our booking tool as of May 31, and they can still receive those vaccines if they book through a pharmacy.

So we are prioritizing them. We know they are not able to work from home, so we're prioritizing both that group of workers as well as those young people.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is to the Premier. The government's plan to use COVID-19 as a cover to make remote learning permanent in Ontario has communities reeling. The Waterloo Region District School Board wrote to the Minister of Education regarding the proposed changes. The letter requests that he "halt implementation of this TVO/TFO-based, independent online learning proposal" until further research is completed and all key stakeholders are consulted.

School boards aren't alone. Andrea Brown, a Waterloo region parent of two, wrote to the MPP for Waterloo, "We still don't understand the full impacts of the pandemic on our kids."

After a year of uncertainty and disrupted learning, the last thing our kids need is a backdoor move to permanently cut funding for in-person learning.

Mr. Speaker, my question is simple: Can the Premier guarantee that funding for in-person learning will not be affected for September?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What the government can guarantee is that every parent in Ontario will have a choice of in-class and online learning—a choice that would be denied if the members opposite had their way. I think it's important that we appreciate that this pandemic—while we all look forward to a world with vaccines that will reduce risk, we believe parents are best positioned to make the decision for their child, recognizing that, overwhelmingly, most kids will be in school, and that is good thing for their development and their mental health.

We put a plan in place, \$1.6 billion of investment to protect in-class learning, to protect public education in this province—more than any province in this country—following the best advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, an additional \$200 million for remote learning to strengthen that capacity. There are literally over 150,000 more tablets provided to families; over 10,000 Internet connections. We've expanded professional development to make the online remote learning experience better for families, for children, and for educators themselves. We've done this all in spite of the opposition by the New Democrats, Liberals and teacher unions because we believe at the end of the day it's critical that children continue to learn irrespective of the challenges we face at home and abroad.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Back to the Premier: Without real investments in public education, diverse learners and their families will suffer. One of Andrea's children is in the pre-IB program, and her oldest child, who is on the autism spectrum, has severe anxiety. She insists that the impact of remote learning must be better understood: "For both my children the quality of their education is dramatically reduced."

Mr. Speaker, like Andrea, the WRDSB trustees are demanding that government decisions be based on research. They write, "We are concerned with the lack of research showing that this proposal will improve student achievement and well-being," and they raised their "emphatic objection to the rushed and radical changes to remote learning" being proposed by the ministry.

As my daddy always says, "Hurry brings worry, and worry wears you out." So my question, through you, to the Premier: Will the government commit to assessing the impact of remote learning during the pandemic and halt all steps to make this permanent in Ontario?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What is a radical concept, in my estimation, is the idea that a politician will know better than a mother or father in this province. I find that very offensive for parents in Ontario who want to retain the choice of in-class or online learning. We believe in providing that choice. We believe in funding them, delivering them through public education, and we also believe that our online learning system has improved over time, because we've made the requisite investments to ensure it is there when we need it. For a snow day in this province all the way to a global pandemic, this province is uniquely ready to keep our kids learning, which is critical for their development and of course for their own mental health.

Mr. Speaker, we provided in our budget an additional enhancement in the remote learning system, but at the end of the day our priority remains keeping our in-class learning safe. It's why we've invested \$1.6 billion for more staffing, enhanced cleaning, the maintenance of public health nurses and testing to ensure kids and staff are safe in this province.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: To the Minister of Health: On January 15, I warned the Premier and the public that the lockdown is deadlier than COVID. I said at public health that opioid overdose was trending 50% higher. I was accused of misinformation and removed from caucus. This week, the final numbers came in. Fatal overdoses rose 75% in Ontario from March to December 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. Almost double the people aged 25 to 44 lost their lives, an increase of 501. Compare that to a total of 159 people who lost their lives to COVID between the ages 20 to 50.

Every loss of life is tragic, so we should try and save it. The increase in deaths from overdose alone is more than triple compared to all deaths from COVID ages 20 to 50. And that's just overdose. Add suicides, delayed surgeries and cancer screenings—the deaths of these young people are on this government.

I've been warning them about this for a year now. So I ask the minister to turn off the answering machine, show compassion, and before more people die from everything but COVID, tell us that she'll end the lockdown.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, there's a lot to do. I will say that I'm aware that the report came out. I'm very grateful to Dr. Huyer and his team and the other individuals who put this report together. We take this very seriously, and that is why we are working with them on their recommendations, which make eminent sense.

However, with respect to the lockdown, we entered into the lockdown because of the variants of concern that have caused very high transmission in our communities, that are also threatening the lives of many, many people. That's why we had to implement the lockdown: to save those lives. That's the whole purpose of it. Any life lost is tragic. But we need to continue with this until the time is right, until the levels are down lower, before we can start exiting this lockdown, because, again, the goal remains the same. The health and well-being of the people of Ontario is our utmost priority and will continue to be.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, I don't understand. We all want to save lives. The argument is that our measures are taking more lives than they're saving. The evidence is in. I'll buy every member here a copy of the Star which outlines the numbers: in Ontario, ages 20 to 50, the increase, the delta of people dying from overdose is triple the number of people dying from COVID. Enough with this COVID political theatre already. All life is life, and all life is precious. These members, these ministers—they know their policy is resulting in more harm and more lives

lost than saved. They ran to serve the people, not harm them. The delayed surgeries and the almost one million cancelled cancer screenings alone will render the human toll of their fearmongering and lockdown multiple times deadlier than COVID could ever be.

This goes for the NDP and the Liberals as well: Why do you keep pretending when the evidence is in front of you?

Speaker, I'm asking the minister, as a colleague, a mother, a human being, will she please end this human catastrophe?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Any life lost is a tragedy, and we know that over 4,000 people have died from COVID-19 in Ontario. There have been losses due to the opioid crisis as well. That's why we have been working on it since before this pandemic even started. We started with the consumption and treatment services sites. There are 16 that have already been approved and we're still receiving applications from communities.

We're also working through our Roadmap to Wellness, our mental health and addictions plan, that came out just before this pandemic struck to make sure that we're going to invest \$3.8 billion over 10 years in our mental health and addictions system. It's vitally important that we're dealing with the mental health system. We put \$175 million extra into the system last year and \$176 million this year. We'll continue to do that to protect people from the opioid crisis, but also to help them with their mental health issues.

This is something that is going to last longer than the pandemic will last, and we are prepared to help the people of Ontario through all of their crises and addictions issues.

DEFERRED VOTES

EQUITY EDUCATION FOR YOUNG ONTARIANS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR L'ÉDUCATION EN ÉQUITÉ POUR LES JEUNES DE L'ONTARIO

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

Bill 287, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to equity education and the Education Equity Secretariat Initiatives Branch / Projet de loi 287, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation en ce qui concerne l'éducation en équité et la Direction des initiatives du Secrétariat de l'équité en matière d'éducation.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 287, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to equity education and the Education Equity Secretariat Initiatives Branch.

The bells will now ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I will ask the Clerks to please prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1138 to 1208.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 287, An Act to amend the Education Act with respect to equity education and the Education Equity Secretariat Initiatives Branch, has taken place.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 15; the nays are 33.

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

Second reading negatived.

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

The House recessed from 1209 to 1300.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in her office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): The following are the titles of the bills to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to proclaim the month of June as Filipino Heritage Month / Loi proclamant le mois de juin Mois du patrimoine philippin.

An Act to prohibit unencapsulated expanded or extruded polystyrene in floating docks, floating platforms and buoys / Loi interdisant le polystyrène expansé ou extrudé sans enveloppe de protection dans les quais flottants, les plateformes flottantes et les bouées.

An Act to proclaim Convenience Store Week / Loi proclamant la Semaine des dépanneurs.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and move its adoption.

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

Bill 283, An Act to amend and enact various Acts with respect to the health system / Loi visant à modifier et à édicter diverses lois en ce qui concerne le système de santé.

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

ANTI-ASIAN RACISM EDUCATION MONTH ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LE MOIS DE SENSIBILISATION AU RACISME ANTI-ASIATIQUE

Mr. Ke moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 299, An Act to proclaim May as Anti-Asian Racism Education Month / Projet de loi 299, Loi proclamant le mois de mai Mois de sensibilisation au racisme anti-asiatique.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member from Don Valley North care to explain his bill briefly?

Mr. Vincent Ke: Many members in this House have been speaking about the anti-Asian racism during the pandemic.

Speaker, Asian Canadians have long been viewed as foreigners and outsiders. They became easy targets for some people to direct their frustration and anger.

Acts of racism target individuals or a specific group, but the harmful impact on our society and culture hurts us all.

Speaker, education is the key to combatting racism. With education, we have the opportunity to change how Asian Canadians are viewed and treated.

That is why I am introducing this bill to proclaim May in each year as Anti-Asian Racism Education Month. Please join me in supporting this proposed legislation to acknowledge, address and eliminate anti-Asian racism in our schools, our communities and our province.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ENERGY POLICIES

Hon. Bill Walker: It is my pleasure to address the House today and to provide an update on the progress our government has made on the energy file.

When we took office, we set out to create an electricity system that works better for everyone, from generators to consumers, and all those in between—a system that prioritized the ratepayer, made the energy system independent and reliable, moved towards a market-based system for procurement of new assets, and made the policy environment around energy predictable.

Since that time, our government has taken many steps towards fulfilling that vision—steps that cut red tape, stabilize costs, drive efficiency, and strengthen trust and transparency in the sector.

For example, we made fixing the hydro mess our first order of business and focused on conservation and modernization of the Ontario Energy Board.

We moved quickly to repeal the Green Energy Act and wind down more than 750 renewable energy contracts, which is expected to avoid \$790 million in long-term electricity system costs.

We cut the previous government's cap-and-trade carbon tax and moved to restore public confidence in Hydro One by promoting greater transparency and accountability, with a new board and a new compensation framework.

Our government is committed to building an effective and transparent long-term energy planning framework that reduces future political interference and prioritizes Ontario's energy consumers. Empowering independent agency-led planning will protect the interests of rate-payers, improve accountability and investment certainty, and restore confidence in energy decision-making. As we develop this new framework, we are inviting energy sector participants, experts, Indigenous communities, and Ontario businesses and residents to share their expertise, experience and ideas about the best path forward.

Of course, what was not part of our plan for transforming the energy system was the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, but we acted swiftly and efficiently in response to the crisis by addressing the financial pressures that many Ontario families and businesses were facing, with immediate electricity rate relief measures. We knew how important it was for those spending more time at home to use the electricity they needed without fear of being charged higher bills.

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, our government rolled out a number of measures to help families and businesses across Ontario weather the storm, including:

- investing over \$175 million to provide emergency rate relief to residential, farm and small business electricity consumers through the suspension of time-of-use pricing in Ontario and temporarily introducing a flat rate 24 hours a day;

- extending the disconnection ban so that no Ontarian was cut off from electricity in the depths of the pandemic, and

- introducing customer choice, which provides electricity customers the option to switch from time-of-use pricing to a tiered rate pricing plan and choose a billing system that best suits their household and lifestyle.

We also acted to assist commercial and industrial electricity consumers with temporary relief on their electricity bills. We deferred a portion of the global adjustment for the period from April to June 2020. We increased flexibility for large consumers to qualify for Ontario's industrial conservation initiative, or ICI. We implemented a peak hiatus under ICI to relieve participants of the need to reduce electricity demand during peak hours, allowing them to focus on returning to full levels of operation. And as of January 1, 2021, the province is funding a portion of non-hydro renewable energy contract costs so they are no long being paid by electricity consumers, saving industrial and commercial employers an estimated 15% and 16%, respectively.

Mr. Speaker, to further support those Ontarians hardest hit by the economic fallout of the pandemic—together

with the Ontario Energy Board and local distribution companies—we introduced the COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program, or CEAP, initially providing \$9 million to provide families who are struggling to pay their electricity bills with a one-time payment to help with electricity and natural gas bill debt incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, we initially invested \$8 million to create the COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program for Small Business, or CEAP-SB, helping small businesses and charitable organizations struggling to pay their electricity bills during the pandemic.

As a result, these two programs have provided emergency support to thousands of residential and small business customers struggling with energy bills. And as there continues to be a need for this assistance, we provided an additional \$23 million to CEAP for residential, small business, and charitable organization consumers. This additional investment will help ensure that support continues to be available to electricity and natural gas customers who are struggling with their bills.

Additionally, the COVID-19 energy cost rebate program was launched in November 2020 to provide eligible businesses 100% of reported energy costs with respect to periods they were required to close or significantly restrict services as a result of provincial public health measures. As of April 20, 2021, the grant has provided over \$78 million in financial support through more than 23,000 unique applications.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also underlined the need for access to reliable broadband for Ontario families, businesses and individuals to be able to work from home, learn online, connect with family and friends, and access vital services. However, as many as 700,000 households and businesses in Ontario still lack access to adequate broadband speeds or have no Internet connection at all. Now, more than ever, as the province recovers from the pandemic, we need an Ontario-made plan to help build infrastructure faster, strengthen our communities and lay the foundation for growth, renewal and long-term economic recovery.

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That's why we teamed up with the Minister of Infrastructure to take swift action to remove barriers and help connect more people and more communities to reliable high-speed Internet with the recently passed Supporting Broadband and Infrastructure Expansion Act, 2021. This legislation provides the tools to help reduce the costs to Internet and telecommunications service providers associated with attaching broadband wirelines to hydro utility poles. It also helps provide for timely access to hydro utility poles and to municipal rights-of-way to install broadband on municipal land.

As a government, we cannot afford to let preventable barriers stand in the way of achieving this important goal. Our intent, by removing these barriers, is to speed up Ontario's broadband expansion, all in an effort to increase our competitiveness and create new opportunities, while making life more convenient for individuals, families and

workers. Our government believes all Ontarians deserve access to reliable high-speed broadband and equal opportunity to engage in our ever-growing digital economy and lifestyle, and we are working with stakeholders to determine how best to remove these barriers.

Mr. Speaker, we also believe all Ontarians deserve access to reliable and affordable heating, especially during this time of economic instability brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, so we're taking action in that regard as well. Natural gas is the most common heating source in Ontario and is more affordable and less carbon-intensive than other sources like heating oil. Natural gas expansion can be net carbon-neutral or carbon-negative, as natural gas replaces more greenhouse gas-intensive sources of energy.

However, thousands of Ontarians don't have access to reliable and affordable heating—primarily those people living in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. Switching to natural gas could save these customers between \$250 and \$1,500 per year. But we recognize that many communities would never be able to afford the upfront costs of providing access to natural gas on their own. That's why we introduced the natural gas expansion program to expand natural gas access to families and businesses throughout rural and northern Ontario. We launched the program in 2019 with phase 1, which is well under way, with construction that is ongoing or completed for six of the nine projects. Phase 1 projects are forecasted to connect 9,000 customers over the next 10 years in rural, northern and Indigenous communities in Ontario.

We have since launched the second phase of the project. Phase 2 will continue to expand natural gas to more communities, improve economic development, and save customers in rural, northern and Indigenous communities in Ontario between \$250 and \$1,500 per year. We have learned that demand for access to natural gas is very, very strong. In fact, demand for phase 2 funding has actually been overwhelming. The Ontario Energy Board received a total of 210 project submissions from all corners of Ontario—a significant uptake, and one that far exceeded the \$130 million in available funding. While I am thrilled by the response to the program, it does pose some challenges. These 210 submissions amount to a total combined ask of \$2.6 billion in funding from the natural gas expansion program. Given the large number of applications and the amount of funding available, it is not possible for the program to provide support to all projects at this time. In determining which projects to move forward with at this stage, our top priority is to distribute available funding as objectively and as broadly as possible across Ontario. All projects have been reviewed in a fair and consistent manner that takes regionality into consideration. We plan to announce the successful projects for the second phase of the natural gas expansion program this spring.

Ontario also continues to move forward with the expansion and reinforcement of the electricity transmission system. Reliable and adequate power is critical for businesses and residents to participate in the economic recovery from COVID-19.

I want to highlight a few essential projects that have continued to make progress with development and construction under strict COVID-19 protocols.

The Watay Power project, currently under construction, will build out approximately 1,800 kilometres of transmission lines in northwestern Ontario to connect 16 remote First Nation communities to the Ontario power grid by the end of 2023. This project is majority-owned by First Nations, and it will end the communities' reliance on costly and unsustainable diesel generators.

The east-west tie, a 450-kilometre reinforcement between Wawa, Marathon and Thunder Bay, is also under construction by NextBridge and is expected to be in service by the first quarter of 2022. This project will ensure there is reliable power available to northwestern Ontario so that the region is poised to participate in economic recovery.

In southwestern Ontario, Hydro One is undertaking development work on transmission projects to support growing electricity demand in the region due to the expansion of the greenhouse sector. This area is undergoing significant economic growth, and we are taking steps needed to ensure power is available.

Development work is also under way in northwestern Ontario, where Hydro One is advancing planning on the Waasigan line.

Supporting all Ontarians through these unprecedented times continues to be our government's top priority. But while our primary focus remains protecting the health and well-being of our citizens, we are also committed to fuelling our provincial economy's recovery and to moving ahead with priorities for Ontario's energy system.

Last summer, as part of the Ontario jobs and recovery fund consultations, we received comprehensive advice from a wide range of energy stakeholders on how the energy sector can support Ontario's economic recovery. Based on those consultations, we embarked on a recovery strategy that focuses on reducing electricity costs, developing measures for a reliable and resilient system, and continuing with sector evolution and innovation.

This means that, going forward, we are committed to working with businesses and other partners on the innovative energy solutions that create a more competitive business environment, reduce electricity costs and deliver a clean, reliable energy future. For example, we want to make Ontario a global leader in new nuclear, small modular reactors—known as SMRs—as well as life-saving medical isotopes and hydrogen, because these represent tremendous opportunities in job creation and new economic opportunities for our province.

As you may know, I'm an enthusiastic advocate 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.

Ever since the first Candu reactor went into service in 1962, the nuclear industry has been a source of innovation

and specialized employment in the country. Today, Canada's nuclear industry supports 76,000 jobs, mostly in Ontario. Those jobs include the areas of science, high tech, engineering and mathematics. We have successfully exported Candu technology around the world, including Argentina, Romania, South Korea and China.

Perhaps most importantly, given the current global situation, Ontario's nuclear industry is a major world supplier of medical isotopes to sterilize medical equipment and increasingly treat cancers and tumours. As health care systems across the globe face increased pressures due to COVID-19, the need for Canadian-made medical isotopes is more critical than ever.

Today, 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, as you heard our House leader say last month when he delivered a statement on behalf of Minister Rickford and myself, SMRs do truly represent one of the most exciting areas of new nuclear innovation in Ontario. Because they are smaller than conventional nuclear reactors and can operate independently or be linked to multiple units, depending on the required amount of power, SMRs are versatile and a potential game-changer for the energy industry.

Our province has been working with other 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. In 2019, our province joined Saskatchewan and New Brunswick to collaborate on the development and deployment of SMRs through a memorandum of understanding, or MOU. All three provinces have a strong history of nuclear energy, through nuclear plants in Ontario and New Brunswick, and uranium mining in Saskatchewan.

The Premiers of Ontario, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan and the utilities—Ontario Power Generation, Bruce Power, NB Power and SaskPower—partnered to release a feasibility study recently for SMR development and deployment in their respective provinces.

On April 14, the Premiers of New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta joined virtually to release a study and to formally welcome Alberta as a signatory to the SMR memorandum of understanding, MOU, previously signed by New Brunswick, Ontario and Saskatchewan.

The study confirms the feasibility of SMRs in Canada and that their development would support domestic energy needs, curb greenhouse gas emissions, and position Canada as a global leader in this emerging technology. With the addition of Alberta to the MOU, all provinces involved have agreed to collaborate on the advancement of SMRs as a clean energy option to address climate change and regional energy demands, while supporting economic growth and innovation.

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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.

SMR development is a natural evolution for Ontario. With our experienced nuclear operators, robust nuclear supply chain, thousands of highly skilled nuclear workers and long-standing expertise in the industry, we are uniquely positioned to support the development and deployment of this cutting-edge technology in Ontario, Canada and globally. They have the potential to drive job creation, economic growth and expert opportunities, and while we're still years away from seeing SMRs operating here in our province, we're 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 in 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 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 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 benefits for Canada and create opportunities to export technology and expertise to address global issues like climate change and energy security.

SMRs present 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-19 economic recovery.

Our government is excited to work with businesses, stakeholders and government partners on innovative energy solutions that create a more competitive business environment and a clean, reliable energy future.

For example, hydrogen, like SMRs, also has the potential to drive job creation and economic growth and help us lower greenhouse gas emissions. That's why I'm working with my colleagues the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Economic Development to develop hydrogen as a potential energy source.

We are also continuing to work with utilities as we expand access to natural gas across rural, northern and Indigenous communities. As I mentioned earlier in my update, our government is excited about progress in phase

1 of natural gas expansion, and we look forward to sharing more success stories with this House after we announce a new round of projects in the coming weeks that will connect more people to affordable, reliable and lower-carbon intensive natural gas.

Mr. Speaker, 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.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, thank you very much for this opportunity.

My thanks to the minister for his presentation. He won't be surprised that I disagree with him. In fact, anyone who thought otherwise would have lost a lot of money in a bet with him.

I'm surprised that this statement was even made, because I'm not quite sure what's in there that's news.

I just want to touch on a few things. There was no mention of the promise made by the Progressive Conservative Party before the last election to cut hydro rates by 12%, and frankly, that's because there is no program, no plan, no road map to actually do that. They don't have any idea how to do that; that's why it doesn't get mentioned.

I noticed the commentary about repealing the Green Energy Act. What wasn't mentioned was that Ontario paid well over \$200 million for those cancellations. What's also not mentioned is, there's the expectation that within this decade, we're going to need new electricity generation, so those projects that would have come on board to actually deal with the gap in supply have been cut, at substantial cost to us.

The minister mentioned the cancellation of the cap-and-trade program. What he didn't mention was that with that cancellation, the carbon tax put in place by the Canadian government came into effect at a higher carbon price than was paid by Ontarians when they set the price here in this province. I don't think that's consistent with the line or the argument that this government has taken about itself. Even within its own terms, it undermines its goals.

But I want to say something else about that. The reality is that with the substantial flaws in the Liberal plan, there was at least something like \$2 billion a year being invested in climate projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That was eliminated. This government promised in its climate plan in fall of 2018 that it was going to put \$400 million into a carbon trust to spark large-scale investment in GHG reduction. Well, there is no mention of that in any of the ministry briefing books that have come before estimates—none, and this is 2021.

So the reality is that this government has not only undermined the development of renewable energy, which is going to be critical to reduce our emissions, but at the same time cut out a program that was actually in other ways cutting our emissions.

This government has engaged in a war on climate action that has been remarkably successful, and I don't

think it's a success that anyone wants to boast about—not at all.

With regard to the help for those who are dealing with COVID-19, one of the things that has come up in my riding—and I imagine this happened with other people—is that in this most recent period of stay-at-home orders, there was no support extended. People still need that support. It was given under public pressure earlier in the pandemic and ignored for the last few months, and I don't think that's right. I don't think that's something that reflects the interests or the desire of the people of Ontario. It's a big mistake.

The other reality is that the electricity system in Ontario is increasingly burning more and more gas. It's increasing its emissions, and within a decade we will see greenhouse gas emissions from our electricity system higher than anything we've seen since we shut down coal. We're actually going backwards. The ability of this government to meet its climate targets is being undermined by the government itself.

I want to note in closing, just about SMRs, that this is way overhyped. I have had an opportunity to talk to people who are actually engaged in doing this work for OPG and others. I'll first note that SMRs are a signal that this government has given up on the Candu technology. They recognize it's not going anywhere. There is no investment. I will point out that advanced Candu reactors were something that were being pushed a while ago; they're dropped.

I also want to note that the Anishinabek Nation, in 2019, said they had no desire whatsoever for any SMRs on their territory, because they understand what would happen: They would be put in place and they would be abandoned, and, effectively, every small community that had one of these would become a nuclear waste site.

This is not a technology that should be considered at this point.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to rise in the House and respond to the minister.

Speaker, one thing the minister did not talk about in his statement is that the government has failed to fulfill its promise to reduce electricity prices by 12%. Not only that, the government's policies are actually going to increase electricity prices and pollution.

The government's plans right now are to ramp up gas plants. That's how they want to close the gap. Gas, on average, costs 11.8 cents a kilowatt hour to generate electricity. Let's compare that to renewable energy. Solar contracts right now are going from anywhere between 3.8 cents to 5.5 cents a kilowatt hour. Quebec hydro: five cents a kilowatt hour. Wind contracts: 3.4 to 7.4 cents a kilowatt hour. SMRs, which the minister talked about: estimated cost, 16.3 cents a kilowatt hour. The numbers speak for themselves. I haven't even got to the cheapest source of addressing our electricity needs: energy efficiency and conservation. Average cost: 1.7 cents a kilowatt hour.

So what has this government done? They cancelled all the energy efficiency and conservation programs, our cheapest and lowest-cost source of addressing our energy

needs. They cancelled renewable energy projects, costing us well over \$200 million at a time when prices are dropping dramatically.

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I know a few members have mentioned the Liberals. It is true; the previous Liberal government bought a little bit of renewable energy at inflated prices. But this government is getting out of the renewable game when the prices are low. They must have missed the last 10 years when prices had dropped so dramatically. My investment advisers always say to me, “Mike, buy low, sell high.” Well, the Liberals bought high, and this government is selling out low. That is an investment strategy that’s going to be a failure for Ontario.

In addition, ramping up gas plants—and my gosh, the previous government can tell you all you want to know about not wanting to play around with gas plants—will increase climate pollution in Ontario by 300% in the next decade, 500% in the next two decades. The government, according to the Auditor General, already has a made-to-fail climate plan, but now their electricity plan is going to make it even worse. So what are we doing? We’re ramping up pollution with higher-cost sources of electricity and cancelling contracts and programs for the lowest-cost sources of electricity. No wonder the government is not going to reach their 12% reduction target.

Finally, I would encourage the minister—and I’m happy to get him a copy of this. The International Energy Agency, just two days ago, released a report—and the IEA, as you all know, is a pretty darned conservative, mainstream and historically pro-fossil fuel organization. They said clearly and unequivocally that there is no way the world can meet the Paris climate targets if any new money goes into fossil fuel infrastructure, period.

So I don’t understand why this government seems to be doubling down on high-cost, dirty sources of electricity like gas plants at a time when it is clear that (1) that’s not going to meet our climate objectives and (2) because the IEA has said no new fossil fuel infrastructure, global capital is going into renewables. Do we want those investments in Ontario? Do we want those jobs in Ontario? Do we want those economic benefits in Ontario? I say yes. The government seems to be wanting to say no.

Speaker, we need to have an honest conversation about electricity policy in this province and invest in the lowest-cost sources of electricity generation and energy conservation programs.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This petition is from the Elementary Teachers of Toronto. It was very pertinent before, during and certainly will be very pertinent after this pandemic. It’s entitled “Don’t Increase Class Sizes or Cancel Full-Day Kindergarten.”

“Whereas the vast majority of parents, students, and educators support smaller class sizes and the current model of full-day kindergarten and want the best education possible for the students of Ontario; and

“Whereas larger class sizes negatively impact the quality of education, reduce access to teaching resources, and significantly diminish teacher-student interactions; and

“Whereas the impact of larger class sizes will be particularly detrimental to students who need additional support; and

“Whereas Ontario has an internationally recognized public education system that requires careful attention and the investment to ensure all of our students can succeed;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to reducing class sizes, maintain the current model of full-day kindergarten, and make the necessary investments in public education to build the schools our students deserve.”

I certainly support this petition. I will be signing my name to it and giving it to the Clerk, who will be coming here shortly.

EDUCATION

Mr. Roman Baber: Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas remote learning adversely affects the health and mental health of Ontario’s children;

“Whereas many Ontario children exhibit increased signs of anxiety and depression;

“Whereas learning at home increases the risk of eating disorders;

“Whereas in-class education is essential for the proper development of social and interpersonal skills;

“Whereas the academic skills of Ontario’s children are regressing;

“Whereas the risk of transmission of COVID-19 amongst children is significantly lower than that of adults;

“Whereas the risk of illness or adverse effects of COVID-19 are significantly lower to children than adults;

“Whereas single-parent families are particularly inconvenienced and cannot maintain full-time work;

“Whereas suicide rates among children are on the rise;

“Whereas women in particular are forced to leave the workforce to care for children at home;

“Whereas parents are struggling to balance home, work and family responsibilities;

“Whereas schools have not shown to be sources of spread;

“Whereas Ontario’s children are suffering and need to be back in school;

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

“To call on the government of Ontario to return all of Ontario’s students back to school immediately.”

I’m pleased to support this petition and join the 12,225 Ontarians who have signed it already.

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr. Dave Smith: I have a petition entitled “Christopher’s Law Amendment Act, 2020.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario’s top priority always has been and will continue to be the safety of its citizens; and

“Whereas our neighbourhoods, schools and charities that work with vulnerable people deserve the resources to be safe; and

“Whereas we need to strengthen the tools available in order to keep our children safe; and

“Whereas our government has zero tolerance for sexual abuse of Ontario’s students and children, and we will continue to take any and all measures possible to protect Ontario’s most vulnerable;

“Whereas, if passed, Christopher’s Law Amendment Act, 2020, would require the ministry to make the information recorded on the Sex Offender Registry available to the public in accordance with the regulations;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Christopher’s Law Amendment Act, 2020.”

I thoroughly endorse this and will send it down to the table.

OPTOMETRY SERVICES

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I have a petition from optometrists from my riding of Guelph.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas the government only covers an average of 55% of the cost of an OHIP-insured visit, the lowest rate in Canada; and

“Whereas optometrists must absorb the other 45% for the over four million services delivered annually under OHIP; and

“Whereas optometrists have never been given a formal negotiation process with the government; and

“Whereas the government’s continued neglect resulted in 96% of Ontario optometrists voting to withdraw OHIP services beginning September 1, 2021;

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

“To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to legally binding, formal negotiations to ensure any future OHIP-insured optometry services are, at a minimum, funded at the cost of delivery.”

I support this petition. I will sign it and send it to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EXTENSION OF EMERGENCY ORDERS

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I move:

Whereas certain orders made pursuant to section 7.0.2 of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act were continued pursuant to section 2 of the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020; and

Whereas, pursuant to subsection 8(1) of the act, the power to amend and extend the orders expires on the first anniversary of the day the orders were continued by the act; and

Whereas, pursuant to subsection 8(2) of the act, the powers to amend and extend the orders may be extended only by resolution of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; and

1340

Whereas the Premier has recommended that the powers to amend and extend the orders be extended to December 1, 2021;

Therefore, the powers to amend and extend the orders referred in subsection 8 (1) of the act are extended until the end of the day on December 1, 2021.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Ms. Jones has moved government notice of motion 111.

Further debate?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I am here in the House today to open debate on the extension of the powers to amend and extend orders under the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020.

Before I dive into the specifics, I first want to remind the House of the tremendous sacrifice the people of Ontario have made over the last number of months and the steps we as a province have taken together in our fight against the deadly COVID-19 virus. Thousands of front-line health-care workers have put their lives on the line to treat and save others. Volunteers, businesses, and Ontarians across the province have rallied together to battle this pandemic. And, sadly, Ontarians have lost their lives to this virus, impacting the lives of thousands of others, including family members and friends.

Speaker, we must remain vigilant and continue to do all we can to stop the spread of COVID-19 and its variants.

Members of the House may recall that the passage of the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, or the ROA, happened in July 2020. At that time, COVID-19 had been with us for several months, and we were focused on a gradual and safe lifting of restrictions that would allow the province to safely reopen and enable a cautious restart of activities and steady recovery from the pandemic. The ROA was passed by this House to ensure important public health and workplace safety measures remained in place to address the threat of COVID-19 once the first provincial emergency that was declared under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, or EMCPA, came to an end.

Specifically, certain orders that had been made under the EMCPA were continued under the ROA when the ROA was proclaimed into force. Since then, these measures have provided the province with the necessary

flexibility to address the ongoing risks and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While two additional provincial emergencies have been declared under the EMCPA as the COVID-19 pandemic has continued its grip on our province, the ROA has allowed us to ensure the public health measures needed to limit the spread of COVID-19 remained in place. This includes the ability to extend and amend certain existing orders such as those related to workplace rules or practices, restrictions on gatherings and events, and compliance with public health advice.

The Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020, was proclaimed into force on July 24, 2020, and the ability to extend or amend orders under this act will cease to apply on the first anniversary of the day orders were continued, unless extended by the Legislature for additional periods of no more than one year.

Speaker, it is our proposal to extend the powers under the ROA until December 1, 2021. We are introducing this resolution after careful consideration. It takes into account the current available evidence to us, our experience to date with COVID-19, and the valuable input and advice of public health experts who have been providing guidance and expertise since the start of the pandemic.

I will outline why we are proposing this extension.

In the short term, due to high COVID-19 transmission, capacity issues in hospital intensive care units and public health units, and the continued impact of variants of concern, the House recently passed a motion to extend the period of the third declared provincial emergency to at least June 2.

In the medium term, even with vaccination rates increasing, COVID-19 transmission rates still need to be assessed.

Based on current evidence and our experience in combatting COVID-19, the province will require some level of public health and workplace safety measures, such as wearing a mask, for the foreseeable future.

We have no responsible choice but to remain vigilant and continue following public health advice to ensure the progress we have made so far in stopping the spread of this deadly virus will not be undone. As legislators, we have a duty to deliver a practical and flexible plan that supports the progress Ontarians have made while recognizing the ongoing risks of COVID-19 and its variants. That is why we're carefully and thoughtfully planning every step of our recovery process in our efforts to re-establish Ontario.

Our proposal to temporarily extend the powers under the ROA maintains the steady approach we have taken through this global public health emergency and builds on the experience that has been gained at every step. The full name of the reopening Ontario act includes its description as "A Flexible Response to COVID-19," and with good reason: The ROA provides the tools that allows us to loosen or tighten restrictions as needed to help protect Ontarians and keep them safe. There are currently 29 orders in force under the ROA. While this is the number currently in force, orders have been amended as needed, and some revoked as they were no longer needed since the act came into force last year.

As members of the Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight are aware, as well as other members of this House, orders can only be extended under the ROA for 30 days at a time. The ROA also requires that at least once every 30 days, the Premier or a delegate minister appear before and report to the select committee on orders that were extended during the reporting period and the rationale for the extensions.

The government has been reporting to this committee every month on order extensions, with a comprehensive rationale as to why they're still needed and should remain in place, as well as any orders that have been revoked. With our proposal to extend the powers under the ROA to December 1, 2021, there would be no change to the length of time that orders could be extended. The powers to amend orders would continue to be subject to certain criteria under the ROA, and the requirement to provide a rationale for every extension would still remain.

Throughout this process, the advice of public health experts and front-line workers has been paramount in guiding each of the steps we have taken.

I assure you that these are responsibilities we take very seriously, and I know each member of this Legislature feels the same way.

These decisive actions set Ontario on a steady path to combat the spread of the virus and allow us to begin to overcome the toll it has taken on individuals and families in each of our communities.

Over the last few weeks, we have also seen some remarkable progress in getting Ontarians vaccinated. Indeed, almost 7.5 million doses of the vaccine have been administered. More than 456,000 people are fully vaccinated, and we're on track to have 65% of all adults vaccinated by the end of the month. With an increase in stable supply of vaccines, Ontario's vaccine rollout has had so many successes. We also continue to expand eligibility and access through multiple channels as Ontario's vaccination campaigns ramp up. Workplace, pop-up and mobile clinics have been launched in many hot spot regions to bring the vaccine directly to Ontarians, such as at the Ontario Food Terminal, which administered over 6,000 doses last week.

These are very exciting milestones and a true testament to the determination and dedication of Team Ontario, but we absolutely cannot afford to get ahead of ourselves, and we must remain vigilant to stop the spread of COVID-19. Even though we can't know exactly what is ahead over the next few months, we do know that Ontario is better prepared, more equipped, more knowledgeable and ready to respond. We are confident in our testing structure and that the vaccine distribution rollout, now with a steady supply coming into the province, is well under way to achieve our immunization goals.

Before I wrap up, I would like to take a moment to recognize the teams of health care professionals, volunteers and front-line workers who have sprung into action over the last couple of months to help us get Ontarians vaccinated. While we still have a way to go, the dedicated vaccine teams across this province have shown amazing

resourcefulness, adaptability and resiliency. It certainly hasn't been easy to plan, manage and handle the logistics of mass immunizations when the supply of vaccines has been, frankly, unpredictable. But these teams not only accepted the challenge; they have shown us what success can look like, as more and more Ontarians get vaccinated every single day.

When we work together toward a common goal, good things do happen.

1350

To everyone who has played a role in Ontario's vaccine distribution, we thank you.

To our emergency responders, our health care workers, front-line enforcement and indeed all of those who continue to serve the public while navigating the threat of this deadly virus, we also thank you for your service.

Every decision the Ontario government has made in response to COVID-19 has been informed by medical advice and scientific evidence. Our balanced and measured approach has always put the health and well-being of our most vulnerable citizens first, while supporting the front-line heroes on whom we continue to rely. We continue to act swiftly and nimbly while being accountable and transparent.

Extending the powers of the ROA until December 1, 2021, acknowledges that we need the safety net of public health measures and workplace restrictions in place to keep us safe while we vaccinate even more Ontarians.

There is a reason to be optimistic, and we are making good progress in defeating this deadly virus.

I ask the honourable members of the House to join me with your support of this motion.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today, on behalf of the official opposition, to respond to the motion that is before us, which extends the extraordinary emergency powers that this government gave itself under the reopening Ontario act for a further year. I'm going to say at the outset that the official opposition will not be supporting this motion.

I want to acknowledge the Solicitor General's recognition of the sacrifices of the front-line workers who have kept our province going throughout these 14 long, painful and agonizing months that we have experienced in this province.

She recognized the health care heroes who have been valiantly working on our behalf on the front lines in hospitals and long-term-care homes, who are exhausted by the effort that they have made. We hear from nurses and PSWs who have experienced profound PTSD because of what they have endured throughout this pandemic. I think it's great that the Solicitor General acknowledged that.

She also talked about the essential workers who have, at great personal risk, been working in grocery stores and pharmacies, gas stations, delivery services, manufacturing plants, warehouses. They have been going to work every day throughout this pandemic knowing that they could risk taking the virus home to their families but doing the work that was necessary to keep our province's economy afloat.

But this motion that is before us repays the sacrifices that these workers have made in our province by stripping collective agreements of long-held bargaining rights in terms of how they organize their workplaces. You don't treat heroes this way. I've heard front-line health care workers say that the emergency powers in the reopening Ontario act take health care workers and others from heroes to zeros because of the impact that this legislation has on their workplace.

Speaker, there is no justification, no reason for this government to continue the emergency orders that are set out in the reopening Ontario act. The power to take emergency measures to keep Ontarians safe if we do experience that fourth wave of the virus—those powers are already available to the government. The existing Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act already gives the government the ability that would be necessary to put in place public health measures that may be needed to protect Ontarians from another phase of the virus. The Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act already allows for a phased approach to reopening. There is no possible justification for this one-year extension on the emergency orders, unless it is to continue the attack on worker rights that we have seen repeatedly taken by this government since it was elected in 2018.

The other thing I would question is whether these emergency powers have had any discernible impact on Ontario's success in dealing with the pandemic. These emergency orders allow employers to override collective agreements. They did nothing to prevent the third wave. These emergency orders have been in place since last summer, and that is when we saw the second wave through December and January—and then the third wave, of course, that we are still in the throes of right now.

There were claims at the time from the government that these orders, this attack on collective bargaining, were necessary to help adjust staffing shortages by redeploying staff where they were needed. We have not seen that that ability had any impact whatsoever on staffing shortages. We are still hearing of staffing shortages in long-term-care homes, in health care facilities across the province. So you can't even say that these orders were effective in helping the government respond to this very serious public health emergency that we have been living through.

I want to remind the government that there are two significant dates coming up in just a matter of months. On June 30, the PSW wage enhancement program will be expiring. The pandemic pay, the wage top-up that was given to PSWs to recognize the heroic work they have been doing in long-term-care homes and in home and community care settings, is set to expire. We know that if this government were serious about wanting to address staffing shortages among PSWs, the one thing they could do right now is make that wage enhancement permanent. PSWs deserve to be compensated fairly for the vital work they do to support vulnerable Ontarians.

We also know that, on September 25, this government's paid sick days plan, this meagre three-day program that the government set up, will be expiring. Workers who need to

stay home because they have symptoms of COVID-19—and this will be particularly important in light of the possibility of a fourth wave. We want workers to be able to stay home if they have symptoms of COVID-19, but they won't be able to do that after September 25 because this government failed to put in place the permanent paid sick days that workers need to protect themselves and their families and their communities—and in particular, those essential workers, those front-line workers, those health care heroes I talked about earlier.

1400

We know that throughout this pandemic there are nurses, PSWs and other health care professionals in hospitals and other health care settings who have been forced to take vacation days. They have been forced to stay home without pay if they have had to isolate for the 14-day period of quarantine, if there has been a COVID-19 exposure. Those workers, who are doing such incredible, important work for all of us on the front lines, shouldn't have to take a financial hit if they are staying home to protect their co-workers, to protect their family members, to protect their communities. Yet this government has stood by and allowed that to continue to happen, allowed health care workers to be forced to take unpaid leaves of absence or use up the vacation days to which they're entitled if they need to be able to self-quarantine.

The other thing I wanted to talk about is that it's not just sick pay or sick days or vacation days that will be affected by this extension of the emergency orders. The powers set out in the reopening Ontario act allow the government to override worker rights in many, many areas of the collective agreements. It allows override of article 7, the grievance and arbitration procedure; article 9, seniority provisions; article 10, contracting out; article 11, the work of the bargaining unit; article 12, leaves of absence; article 13, sick leave; article 14, hours of work; article 16, holidays; article 17, holidays; and article 18, vacation. All of these provisions in collective agreements that workers have fought so hard for are now at risk because of this government and the power that it has taken to override collective agreements. Think about the impact of that on the workers in this province. Think about the impact on those workers who have risen to the challenge of keeping our province going throughout this pandemic. Their vacations can be arbitrarily cancelled. Their shifts can be changed.

For example, if they work the day shift, if they have child care arrangements in place to enable them to work the day shift when they have children at home—their shift could all of a sudden be changed from the day shift to night shift.

Their job, their position could be eliminated, and they could be reassigned, with no say whatsoever, to another position. Their hours of work can be changed without any input or agreement from the employee who is affected. Leaves of absence can be cancelled or denied. They can be moved to another site.

Again, think about the transportation needs of people who may rely on public transit to get to their workplace in

the morning. All of the plans that people have made to get to their place of work can be upended, because all of a sudden a worker can be reassigned to another site.

And, I think most troublingly, contractors and volunteers can be brought in to do work, as long as there is not a layoff. These contract workers, these volunteers can be brought in to a unionized workplace and take on the bargaining unit work, and the worker who had been doing that job can simply be reassigned. There is no question that this is a profound attack on worker rights and, honestly, it's an affront to democracy. As I said, it is absolutely no way to recognize the heroism of the workers who have come through for all Ontarians during this period of crisis.

But I have to say, I don't think the nurses in this province will too surprised by this motion that is before us, by this government's interest in keeping that extraordinary power that they gave themselves under the reopening Ontario act. Why I say the nurses won't be surprised is because in 2019, they and many other public sector workers discovered, with Bill 124, that their rights to collectively bargain wages had been taken away by this government. Bill 124, at the time, said that wage settlements had to be within 1%. And what we hear from nurses is that there has not been—not just nurses; others. But I want to recognize nurses. We just came out of Nursing Week in this province and International Nurses Day. I think all of us have felt more strongly than ever how grateful we are to nurses and other health care professionals.

Nurses in Ontario have not had a wage increase on par with inflation for more than a decade, and yet what we saw with Bill 124 is that it enshrines, it embeds below-inflation wage increases in perpetuity—not in perpetuity; until June 2, 2022, when we're going to have another government elected in this province. This government decided that nurses and other public sector workers deserved no more than a 1% wage increase per year.

I can tell you that recognizing the sacrifices of nurses and other health care heroes certainly means more than stripping them of their collective bargaining rights and stripping them of a wage increase that is even equal to inflation.

So we are not going to be supporting this motion. We are going to continue to call for a full public inquiry into the actions that this government has taken. I talked about the fact that there are big questions about how effective the reopening Ontario act and the emergency measures that are set out in the act have been in terms of responding to COVID-19. Yesterday, I was able to join the leader of the Ontario NDP, Andrea Horwath, in her call for a full judicial inquiry into Ontario's COVID-19 response, which of course includes the measures that are authorized under the reopening Ontario act.

Speaker, we have seen a public health crisis in Ontario that has led to more than 8,500 Ontarians losing their lives. Almost 4,000 of those Ontarians were seniors in long-term-care homes. We have seen scathing reports from the Auditor General, from the long-term-care commission that talked about this government's negligence, frankly, in

applying the lessons learned from wave 1 of the virus to wave 2 to help prevent those deaths in long-term-care homes. As a result, we all know that more seniors lost their lives and more families have been left grieving because of the loss of their loved ones in long-term care after the second wave compared to the first wave. Despite this government's promise of an iron ring around long-term care, we know that nothing of the sort was put in place in Ontario's long-term-care homes.

1410

We need a full judicial inquiry into Ontario's emergency response to COVID-19 because there is good evidence, there is research from health care professionals, that shows that the impact of this pandemic has been more deadly, has dragged on longer than it needed to if effective measures were put in place at the time that they were necessary.

We are still facing the potential overwhelming of our hospital system. I think all of us have been encouraged over the last week or so by the reduction in the number of cases. We know that the number of people who are being hospitalized and who are occupying ICU beds is coming down incrementally, but our health care system is still in a very, very fragile position. Our health care system is still very much at risk of being overwhelmed if we are not able to make our way through this last phase of the virus.

All of us heard at the very beginning of this pandemic from front-line workers—from health care workers, in particular—who were not being provided the PPE that they needed from their employers. I remember being on the phone with nurses at London Health Sciences Centre who were in tears. I was in tears; they were in tears when they talked about their fear, their deep anxiety that they were putting themselves at risk and, more importantly, that they were risking the health of their families. We had nurses who were setting up mobile homes in their driveways so that they didn't have to go into the house when they returned from their shift. They stayed in these mobile homes and didn't see their families throughout those early days of the pandemic.

Speaker, this is another question that has to be investigated by a judicial inquiry into Ontario's COVID-19 response: Why did this government not learn the lessons of SARS? Why did they not apply the precautionary principle in health care settings and workplaces across this province? There was a lot that was not known about the virus when COVID-19 was first identified, and yet the precautionary principle says that you have to assume the worst and put measures in place that are going to protect workers.

Going back to those nurses who were on the phone with me in tears: They were being told that N95 masks were being rationed in their workplaces. They were being kept locked under a desk. They were given one N95 mask a day. They were being asked to reuse N95 masks. That is not the way to apply the precautionary principle and protect health care workers.

There are a lot of other questions that need to be answered about Ontario's pandemic response that could be

addressed by a full judicial inquiry into the COVID-19 measures that were put in place.

Going back to paid sick days, to those front-line workers who on September 25 are no longer going to be able to access the program that this government finally put in place, after more than a year of advocacy and efforts by health care professionals who were telling the government—more than stripping workers of their rights under collective agreements, what is needed is a program of paid sick days that workers could access when they are too sick to go to work. That is the way to address staffing shortages, for one thing, in this province.

We heard from the study that was done by Peel Public Health in the fall and winter of 2020—this report was issued in January of this year. Over that period, Peel Public Health interviewed 8,000 essential workers in Peel who had COVID-19 symptoms. Guess what, Speaker? Two thousand of those 8,000—one quarter; one out of four of those workers—continued to go to work even though they were symptomatic. They did not do this because they wanted to expose their co-workers to infection. They didn't do it because they wanted to expose other transit riders as they rode in packed transit vehicles to work. They didn't want to expose them to the virus. They didn't do it because they wanted to expose their neighbours in the densely packed residential areas that they lived in. They didn't want to expose them to the virus. But they had to feed their families. They had to go to work so that they could get their paycheque, so that they could pay the rent at the end of the month. And yet, it took months and months of advocacy, of calls from a broad cross-section of organizations to get this government to do anything, to implement a program of paid sick days.

When you reflect on the kind of coalition that was built around paid sick days, it included health care professionals, it included medical officers of health, and it included boards of health. We know that boards of health in those 34 different public health units are made up of municipal councillors and they're made up of community representatives. Business leaders and community leaders sit on boards of health. Every single board of health in this province—all 34 boards of health—co-signed a letter to the Premier back in, I think, February calling on this government, urgently, to implement a program of paid sick days for workers in this province.

Also in that coalition that was pushing for paid sick days we saw mayors. We saw the mayor of Brampton, the mayor of Mississauga and the mayor of Toronto also pushing this government to act. We saw small businesses. Even the Ontario Chamber of Commerce recognized the value of paid sick days to protect their workers and to protect themselves from workers feeling that they had no choice but to come to work sick.

1420

Yet, as I say, it took months and months and months before we finally saw a policy response from this government. That is something that a public inquiry could also look into. Why did it take so long? How many lives could have been saved if the government had acted more quickly

on paid sick days? Certainly, that is an issue that has to be addressed. It's an interesting contrast to the measures that were put in place by the reopening Ontario act—the measures that this government intends to extend for another year.

The other issues that we need to look at in terms of Ontario's emergency response include, of course, the devastation that happened in our long-term-care homes, and in particular, the role of private sector for-profit long-term-care-home operators and how the actions of those private long-term-care-home operators increased the death toll in the long-term-care facilities. There have been multiple analyses that have looked at the number of deaths in long-term-care homes that are privately operated versus long-term-care homes that are non-profits or publicly owned by municipalities. Those analyses have consistently shown that the outcomes and the risk of death was much lower for the workers who are in those non-profit or publicly owned homes.

At the same time, we have seen the for-profit operators of these homes take in huge bonuses. Huge shareholder bonuses have been paid out to many of those for-profit operators at the same time that the homes that these for-profit operators were managing were experiencing a devastating death toll among the residents.

We have to look at PSWs and how this government responded to the calls for four hours of daily hands-on care. That has been recognized as essential to ensure that long-term-care-home residents are treated with the dignity and the respect they deserve, and so that PSWs can do the work they are trained to do and long to do with residents. Instead, we heard agonizing accounts from PSWs who spoke to the long-term-care commission about the personal pain they experienced as they watched residents die with no one there, and they were running around in a home that was chronically understaffed.

This government's temporary pandemic pay wage enhancement was really the only thing they could come up with to try to deal with the PSW shortage in long-term care, and we know that they had to be pushed into extending that pandemic pay, even until June 3, and have consistently refused to acknowledge that one of the most impactful reasons for the shortage of PSWs is the lack of fair compensation and the fact that many of the jobs for PSWs in long-term-care homes are not full-time jobs. They are not jobs that come with any kind of security, that come with benefits, pensions or those kinds of things.

To make PSW jobs good jobs would go a long way to not only addressing the staffing shortages, but improving quality of life for the residents who are cared for by PSWs—and also making PSWs, that critically important role, a more satisfying and rewarding occupation for the people who are doing that work.

Speaker, as we look to the reopening of Ontario—I think in about 35 minutes we're going to be hearing from the Premier about the plans—I think we have to reflect on this government's previous reopening plans for the province, and look carefully at what went wrong during those previous reopenings and what we need to make sure we do right in the reopening that is approaching.

We know that in February, for example, the government released a disastrous colour-coded framework that was immediately criticized by medical experts for setting completely wrong benchmarks in terms of how the colour-coding was going to work, but also for being very confusing to Ontarians. We need to look at why the government decided to ignore the public health advice that they were getting at the time from the science advisory table about not moving forward with reopening as quickly as they were doing. We all know the consequences of that reopening too early that happened in February.

Hopefully, unlike the long-term-care sector, where the government failed to learn and apply the lessons from phase 1 to phase 2, as we approach the next period of reopening in the province, the government will learn the lessons from those previous failed reopenings that put Ontarians at risk.

The other thing we certainly have to be looking at is the timing of the government's responses to COVID-19. We were hearing medical experts saying, for example, as early as December, "Don't think about reopening. Now is not the time. We need to take decisive action." This was actually in November and early December. The government needed to act decisively, and instead we saw dithering from this government. Then, finally, there was an announcement before Christmas that there was going to be a provincial shutdown on Boxing Day, five days later. What is the message that is conveyed when the government signals that we are in a very, very serious emergency, that this is a crisis and people need to take this seriously, and yet it says, "Take the next five days and shop and enjoy yourselves until the next state of shutdown is going to be in effect"?

I don't want to suggest that it isn't important to give businesses and families in this province the time that is necessary to plan.

But going back to that colour-coded framework and the metrics that were set out there—this government needs to be transparent about what metrics are going to be used to decide the phased reopening approach in this province.

1430

Ontarians deserve to know. They deserve to have some hope as they, and we, are all watching those daily case counts, waiting until, as Dr. Williams and others have said, there is a sustained period of case counts below 1,000. Ontarians deserve to know what is going to be necessary, what the government is going to be looking at, as those phases of reopening occur. That is the kind of information that gives people confidence, that gives people faith that this government is acting on good information, acting on evidence, acting on advice from scientists and others who understand what metrics to be looking for.

Maybe at 3 o'clock, Ontarians will get that information about the metrics, and I certainly hope so.

But that is another issue that should be addressed by a public inquiry into Ontario's response—the impact of those mixed messages that were given by this government, the impact of poorly communicating the expectations of Ontarians in terms of following public health advice and,

in fact, the impact of directives that were at times contradictory, and what this meant for both public confidence in what the government was asking people to do and the impact of the pandemic and transmission and infection.

Speaker, other issues that we need to be looking at include this government's support for small businesses—what we often heard from this government was this stated commitment to small business and other businesses in the province and this recognition of the importance of keeping our economy going. But instead of doing what the medical experts were telling them and paying small businesses to stay closed, this government took an approach that businesses had to be open even if it undermined the health of the people of this province. That was because they didn't want to invest the money—they didn't want to make the investment in helping businesses stay afloat, helping businesses survive the pandemic, until they had to be pushed into doing something in their March budget.

We had been hearing from small businesses from the very beginning of the pandemic about the need for a rent support program, about the need for additional financial assistance.

In my riding, in London West, I heard from a lot of small businesses who didn't qualify for any of the federal programs, who were worried about the federal loan program, because that would have to be repaid and they didn't know if it made any economic sense to access that federal loan. It would just put them further under water. They didn't qualify for some of the other federal programs. They were looking to the province for support, but it took months and months for the province to do anything, even in the face of very serious problems that were identified right away with the federal-provincial commercial rent support program, which required small businesses not to apply directly to the government for commercial rent support, but to ask their landlords to apply to the federal government for commercial rent support. I know, in London West, there were a lot of small businesses who told me that their landlords had no interest in applying to that program or else didn't qualify because of the criteria that were in place for that program.

That was all known very early in the pandemic—the problems with the commercial rent support program—but again, it took months for this government to revise the way that program was designed and do something that allowed business owners to apply directly for commercial rent support.

The small business grant program that this government has introduced—I'm sure that all of us have been hearing from business owners in our ridings about the problems with that program, as well: the criteria that make many businesses ineligible to apply for the program, and then also all of the problems in terms of the rollout of the grant money. Businesses that have qualified have submitted their applications and have to wait, in some cases, months for that grant money to appear. And we know that the additional \$20,000 comes nowhere near making up the kind of revenue losses that businesses have experienced in the province of Ontario.

Education is another area that really has to be looked at closely. This government's response to keeping students and education workers safe in Ontario schools has to be investigated very carefully through a process like this judicial inquiry that the Ontario NDP is calling for.

We hear the Minister of Education repeatedly say how safe Ontario schools were when schools were open, citing data from the asymptomatic testing program, which was completely inadequate to give an accurate sense of the extent of COVID-19 infection in our schools. This government refused to put in place the measures that public health experts had said were needed: to reduce class sizes, to improve ventilation, to ensure that there was broad asymptomatic testing. Those were the measures that were necessary earlier in this pandemic in order to keep schools as safe as possible for education workers and students.

It took some time and political pressure, frankly, from parents and from teachers in this province to get the government to recognize that education workers have to be a priority for vaccination, if we are truly committed to ensuring that our kids are able to get back to school so that they can participate in that in-person learning that is so critical to their academic success, to their emotional and social development, and to their mental health and well-being. If we are serious about that, then we need to take the measures that are necessary to get kids back in the classroom, and that includes vaccinating education workers.

1440

On the topic of vaccination, there are some legitimate questions that people have raised about the rollout of the vaccination program in this province. We saw the government drag its heels on setting up a vaccine task force which was only put in place in December, although they had known for some time that vaccines would be coming. The vaccinations started, and then there was a Christmas break.

A lot of people had questions about the slowness of the vaccination program. As you know, the government said that it was all related to supply, but we saw from the vaccine tracker efforts that were under way from medical professionals in this province—who have really stepped up, quite frankly, as watchdogs of this government, to give the public accurate information about the number of vaccines in freezers and the number of vaccines in arms. We need to look at why it took so much time, for example, to get long-term-care-home residents vaccinated. They quite rightly were at the top of the priority list, but it took several months, much longer than it should have, to get those long-term-care-home residents vaccinated.

We also have to look at the equity implications of the government's vaccine rollout.

Now, of course, I'm sure that all of us are getting emails and phone calls about second doses. We haven't heard clarity from this government as to the plans for second doses, and in particular, second doses of AstraZeneca.

Speaker, I just want to offer some comments now in my role as democratic reform critic for the official opposition.

The mess, the chaos that we have seen in this province in terms of the response to COVID-19—it didn't have to

be this way. One only has to look at countries like New Zealand that operate on a system of proportional representation to see the benefits of collaboration, coordination and consensus across party lines. We have not seen that from this government ever, in terms of the response to this public health emergency.

Even from the very first days, the government presented legislation that had already been developed. We had several emergency sessions in the chamber shortly after the pandemic was declared to deal with those pieces of legislation, but at no time did the government approach the official opposition and the other parties to say, “What do you think the government as a whole should be doing to deal with this public health emergency?”

In New Zealand, a special committee was established, chaired by the opposition, that looked not only at reviewing government legislation, but at proactively identifying what needed to be done, what kinds of emergency responses needed to be taken. We are all aware of the success of that governance model in New Zealand, where they have basically eradicated COVID-19. Of course, they have the advantage of being an island, but I think there are a lot of lessons that can be learned from the New Zealand model—not only from that process of collaboration, consensus and coordination that is embedded in a proportional representation model of governance, but also in the decisions that were made as a result of that governance model.

Number one: Listen to the science. We saw the science advisory table in Ontario that was providing advice to the government in a behind-closed-doors way. We saw that science advisory table, fed up with the fact that its advice was not listened to, issue a very clear statement in April about what will work to control COVID-19 and what won't work to control COVID-19. As we know, one of the things that they clearly identified as what won't work is discouraging people from participating in outdoor recreational activities, and yet this government chose to announce in the middle of April that all outdoor recreational amenities would be closed.

The government stated that what will work to control COVID-19 is a proper program of paid sick days, and yet this government chose to introduce a program that provides only three paid sick days, and only until September 25. Shortly after the government released its program, we heard Dr. Brown from the science advisory table say very forthrightly—when asked, “Is the government's program of three paid sick days going to be effective?” Dr. Brown said no.

In New Zealand, they listened to the science. The measures they put in place were informed very clearly by medical evidence, by the guidance of health care professionals and public health experts who understood the kinds of measures that were needed to address COVID-19.

The other thing that the New Zealand model showed us is the importance of prioritizing both health and economic considerations. Both have to be equally recognized.

Too often, we saw this government see-saw between one or the other. They had to reopen really fast in order to

get the economy moving again, even if it jeopardized the health of Ontarians. That's what we saw in the last round of reopening that led directly to the third wave.

An analysis of New Zealand's system of all-party co-operation and governance showed that this approach saved lives. It saved lives by ensuring that opposition ideas were shared prior to legislation being brought forward and acted on by the government at the time.

Another lesson from New Zealand's experience in responding to COVID-19 is that people's trust, people's confidence in the government relies on transparency and accountability. It relies on understanding why the measures that the government is asking them to follow are being put in place. It relies on giving people the information that the government is using to make decisions, for example, about the phased reopening of the economy. That is what is so desperately needed in this province: People need to have hope that we are going to come through this. They need to have something to look forward to. They need to be able to plan for what needs to happen in order for the economy to move forward.

1450

Speaker, I think that as we look to the next—certainly to the end of this year, certainly over the period that this motion is going to be extending these emergency orders, until July 2022—that's after the next election, I just realized. As we look to these coming months, we are going to be facing multiple, multiple challenges. There is going to be a legacy in terms of the impact on our health care system—and we know that, in the cancelled surgeries, trying to get people the health care services they need, dealing with the reforms that are necessary in our long-term-care system, helping ensure that our economy is back on track, putting in place measures that will enable a she-recovery to help women come through this pandemic.

These challenges will require, more than ever, consensus, co-operation and collaboration across party lines. I urge this government to take that approach instead of arbitrary, autocratic measures like what is proposed today.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Certainly, this government has given itself extraordinary powers to deal with the pandemic, and as a consolation they've created a committee where the Solicitor General will report on the current state of orders—I should know; I sit on the committee. The committee follows what you can expect: She'll read to us a list for about half an hour, and then we'll have a good half an hour each to ask some questions in a couple of rounds, and that's it. It's not too different from question period in that sense.

There's so much that I could say about this, and the thing is this: I know the government members don't like so much to hear criticisms, because nobody ever really does, but I do think it's our role as the opposition to demand the best. I understand that you feel that your hands are full, and these are difficult and unprecedented times, but that's our role as opposition.

I have a couple of observations to make on the course of this pandemic.

I'd like start with, first of all, pointing one thing out. I can't refer to hypocrisy when I point to anyone in general. Certainly, the Speaker would not like that. In fact, the Speaker just looked at me when I uttered the word, so I'm not going to allege hypocrisy here. I believe in things like coincidences, but I will not say it in that term.

Right at the outset—because a lot of what we've heard in the most recent days has been talk about borders, movement of people—I do want to bring us back to right before the first lockdown occurred. There was a press conference where the Premier was encouraging people on March break to “go out there and enjoy yourselves. Get out there, go to the States, go wherever it is,” right before we were about to lock down—and pretty much at the same time that the World Health Organization was declaring this a global pandemic. So I just want to remind government members that that had been uttered. I understand that there is now a departure, when it comes to their thoughts about borders and travel and whatnot, but right at the beginning in the outset, they did have a different mindset.

Vaccinations: I agree that the federal government could be doing more and could have, throughout this pandemic, done more in terms of getting us vaccine supply. It starts from the top. They are the ones who determine how much supply we get. Is it fair to put all the blame there?

Interjection: Yes.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Now, I'm about to disappoint you, so don't feel too bad about the applause.

Yes, it starts from the top. Do they get enough vaccines? No. And then when it comes here, do they send it where it's needed?

Interjections.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I see we have a federal Liberal member on the government side. Okay.

So do they send it where they need it? No, they don't. But once it gets into the hands of this government, does it go to where it's needed?

My community, just like the Premier's, has been a hot spot community throughout this pandemic. Why? Because it's filled with essential workers, people who even at the most restrictive times of this lockdown were out there, packed on buses, and working hard to keep this economy, the province and everything going. Did they have targeted resources, the access you could imagine that they deserved during this pandemic? No. In just the same way that the federal government did not get us enough vaccines, did not send them where it was supposed to, neither did you.

Interjections.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: You didn't send them where they had to go, and so—

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

I'm sorry to interrupt the member.

I'm going to remind the member and all members of the House to direct their remarks to and through the Chair, not

to the other side, regardless of who is speaking. The back-and-forth is going to stop, as much fun as it seems to be all for members.

The member from Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I apologize, Speaker. In my defence, it's a Thursday afternoon in Queen's Park in the chamber. I think you all know what that means. I'll try my best to work through you on this.

I do not believe they were sending it where it needed to go. And you could see the results—because all you had to do was look at the levels of COVID-19 infection versus vaccination rates. Early on, the difference was staggering. You saw priority, in terms of vaccines, going to places—for instance, in the city of Toronto, where people who are very privileged, like us in this chamber, to be able to work from home, places where you see the most affluence, versus communities where we have essential workers packing on buses, going to work, working in warehouses, working in factories. That's what we saw at the beginning.

Look at pharmacies. Communities like mine were a desert for vaccines. You really didn't see vaccines available. I think there were something like two in the entire area. They still lag behind. That, to me, is not spending the time, effort and resources where they are needed the most. That's what we saw.

In my community, I was very proud to work with an incredible team of health people on the ground, associations, our local hospitals to try to fight tooth and nail to procure more vaccines in every way, shape or form that they could.

And just for the record, when the government goes out there and makes announcements, they usually do it under pressure. When I talk to doctors and leading experts in health care, they say they're getting the information from CP24, just like everybody else is. What kind of leadership is that? That's a little concerning. In fact, I was very concerned when I heard that. I thought they at least had the inside scoop.

So in the case of when we were talking about communities like mine—the NDP have been saying that you have to vaccinate based on risk—they were not making that available.

All of a sudden, there was a press conference. The Premier got up and said, “We're going to make it available to 18-plus.” I immediately called our health care providers. I said, “Oh, my God. Are we going to get the vaccines?” They said, “We didn't know about this. We just heard on the news, just like you.” “Do you have any plan, any supply, any vaccines?” “No.”

So I had to work with the UHN, our amazing local Humber River Hospital, Black Creek Community Health Centre, GlobalMedic—a huge number. We came together and we were able, within a week, to double the vaccination rate of Jane and Finch and a number of postal codes. In fact, it has just been reported now, through the work of these incredible health people on the ground in my community, we now have some of the higher vaccination rates.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Good for you.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you. But that's not based on leadership from the government. It's based on the fact that we had to take matters into our own hands to fill in the gaps of what's lacking.

I want to move on to another area. I think each and every one of us, as we have made phone calls and reached out to communities in different ways, has heard a lot of opinions. One of the things that I continue to hear is the frustration at those who have taken advantage of the pandemic.

The question is, has the government provided strong leadership to ensure that people aren't taking advantage? Do you all remember Pusateri's at the beginning of this, where they were charging like, what, a million bucks for Lysol wipes or something like that?

1500

Ms. Suze Morrison: Not the one in Toronto Centre—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: That's what they normally charge.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: There you go. They were charging this huge amount of money for Lysol wipes, and everybody was saying, "Oh, this is terrible." So the Premier, like he was doing at the beginning of the pandemic, quickly put together a press conference. He had his sleeves rolled up. I was figuring he was going to go and elbow the door in at Pusateri's. He was talking big talk: He was going to get them. He was going to create a hotline. He was going to deal with this.

So in that select committee I asked the question because now—wait for it. Imagine: They put this hotline out here to deal with gouging the province of Ontario and they got—what is it, like 30,000 phone calls? I know the government loves math: How many charges were laid when it came to gouging? Because you know gouging was happening out there. Out of the 30,000, how much?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Zero.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes, zero. That's what we heard.

Take auto insurance: Insurance companies—oh, my God, what have they been doing to us during this pandemic? Let's deal with auto insurance. I reached out—

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Reducing rates.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Come on. All right, I'm not going to spin fantasy in this chamber. I am going to tell you the truth, and here's what it is about auto insurance companies.

In my community, we pay some of the highest rates in all of not just Ontario, but Canada and North America because of where we live, because of our postal code. So I reached out to Toronto police, to the chief of police and I said, "Do you know what I'd like to see? I'd like to see the accident data in Toronto." I'd like to see it from the beginning of the first lockdown, when literally you'd go outside and you could just play road hockey on the Allen Expressway. That's how empty it was; you could be doing that. In three months, the accident rate in the city of Toronto had dropped by 74%.

At the time, the NDP and I were calling for a reduction in rates during the course of the pandemic of 50%. What did the government do? They said, "We will allow insurance companies to give drivers a rebate"—they'll

allow them; they're not going to compel them. They're going to say, "Hey, guys, why don't you do a good PR move and give a little bit of money back?"

Constituents are calling me, and they're fighting tooth and nail to get pennies. Many of them were rejected outright.

Do you know, during the course of the pandemic, how much money insurers have saved? It's \$2.7 billion. They saved that much money, and was that money returned? Do you know what some of them were doing? They were telling their drivers, "Since you're not driving, why don't you just put your car on fire and theft, for instance." I had a person who actually went along, did that, put it on fire and theft, and said, "We're not going to drive this car. We don't need to drive it for three months now." I think they had two vehicles. They put their cars on that. They went back and their insurance rates went up \$300 or \$400. At the time, FSRA was changing its rules. Instead of their quarterly filings—and we all wanted to know; I was just sitting there on the edge of my seat, saying, "I want to see the auto insurance rates. They've got to be coming down." For a year, we didn't know what was going on with auto insurance rates, and when they finally came out, they had gone up.

So here we have \$2.7 billion in savings by auto insurance companies. Here we have rebates—they claimed that savings is when a person puts their car on fire and theft. If accidents are down by 74%, that means if you're driving a vehicle, the chance of you having an accident is 74% reduced. It doesn't matter whether your car is parked or not; the incidence of an accident is far reduced. Guess what happens? Rates go up.

This government has been locking down businesses. Many small businesses may never reopen after this pandemic, which is terrible. Guess what's happening to insurance business rates? They're going up. Businesses are closed, people aren't there—okay, now you will have restaurants doing delivery, but people aren't sitting there, in many cases, dining in there. Their insurance rates are going up. But where's the leadership of this government in tackling insurance companies? I don't understand.

So the list goes on of people who have been taking advantage of this pandemic.

What I expect, as an Ontarian, is to see my government talk about this and take leadership in restraining it. There's so much gouging that's going on right now, so much crisis. While small businesses have been suffering tooth and nail—mom-and-pop shops suffering right now to make ends meet, struggling to get the business support grants—and so many of the people have been reaching out saying, "We've been rejected. We can't even get a reason as to why this has happened," you've got the mega-corporations raking in money, billions of dollars, more than they ever did, and other groups that have been doing well during the pandemic.

Certainly this pandemic has been the biggest global news story, so really what it has done is it has provided cover for the government to be able to deal with other stuff.

I'm going to take you back to the beginning of the campaign. I'll never forget this guy who told me he has always voted Conservative for his entire life. Now he was not going to vote Conservative. He was mad because the Premier was consistently talking about building on the greenbelt. So that happened then, and throughout our time here in the Legislature, they've continued to make forays into finding ways to just build wherever they want.

Now, most recently, in the midst of the pandemic, they took away the power of conservation authorities to protect themselves. They've changed the LPAT, so now if you have a development and you're a community and you don't like it, you can't do anything. They've taken away your power in so many ways to be able to challenge this. I just don't understand.

Again, I believe in coincidence; I really do. You go and you look at an MZO that's issued out, and then you go and you look at the developer, and basically, the day before or the day after, thousands of dollars get donated to the Conservative Party, which happens to be the government, as well. I believe in coincidences—and there are countless examples of this. That's basically what we're seeing in the midst of a pandemic: We have groups of very wealthy, powerful individuals, developers—although they're probably not happy with you guys about the cost of lumber. I'd like to hear from this government what's going on with regard to that, but—

Interjection.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Oh, yes, through the Speaker.

There's a lot of stuff, I'm sure, because you know that these guys—maybe not the rank-and-file members who are here today, and I respect them. I've already said in the chamber that I'm pretty sure the Premier has a Walmart cellphone that he gets, and when the CEO needs to reach him, he just reaches in, and he's got the special ring. I know that the development industry has that special phone call too. I'm sure they've had conversations about that. But they've done well. They get MZOs. The power of communities to be able to determine what kind of development happens in their area has been eroded. The list goes on and on.

Something else I want to talk about—and this one is very, very serious, and this is something that we all agree upon. I mentioned it in a member's statement a couple of days ago, and that's long-term care here in Ontario. Since I took office, I remember meeting countless nurses, PSWs, family members who have come to me, and they've talked about the deplorable conditions of people living in long-term care. I know before I was elected, even under the past government, the NDP called for an inquiry into long-term care because of the situations that are happening that we all hear about. Each and every one of the people in the chamber has heard terrible horror stories. You've seen images of bedsores, like I've said before, that look like shrapnel wounds. I just can't understand how this is happening.

And yet, now we are in the midst of a pandemic, and each time New Democrats have pushed for, let's say, a Time to Care Act that would add hours more each day—

minimum hours of direct care—governments, whether or not they agree with it, will vote on it. It will pass first reading. It will pass second reading. Does it ever get to committee? Certainly, they don't want to go out there and go against it.

Granted, this government have been the fathers and mothers of private long-term care in Ontario. We saw during the pandemic that some of the worst outcomes for residents living there have been within private long-term care. I remember very near the beginning of this pandemic, when we were talking a lot about long-term care in terms of the loss of life, which is just an absolute tragedy—I think we're at 4,000 or something at this point. It's unbelievable. The people dying there are our parents, our grandparents, alone. For every dollar invested into one bed in long-term care that goes into non-profit, it's 79 cents that goes into direct patient care; but in for-profit, it's like 49 cents.

You would think that there would be an incentive, an urgency to deal with this, and yet we're waiting. We're waiting to allow people to be able to go in and see their loved ones. There's a bill that's just sitting there, waiting to make its way all the way to royal assent. There's so much stuff that could be done, but there's no sense of urgency. We know what the problems are. We know we need to invest—we need to get more PSWs. We have to pay them well.

1510

Right at the beginning of the pandemic, we saw cases—the military had to be called in—where you have people sharing PPE because there's not enough in the facility and PSWs who are relegated to work part-time in multiple places. The list goes on. This is stuff that should have been identified right at the beginning of the pandemic, and it wasn't. It took thousands of deaths before changes—and they're not all made.

There's so much that needs to be done to deal with long-term care in this province. These are our loved ones, and this should be a non-partisan issue. I understand that the for-profit industry is very connected to Liberal and Conservative insiders, but at some point, you've got to cut the umbilical cord. You've got to say, "It's enough. You guys have made the money on our loved ones. Now you've got to show them dignity and respect." You can't have a good long-term-care system where the primary motive is profit. It makes no sense. That's something that has to be done immediately.

In the minute and change that I'll wrap up with—because I could probably be here all afternoon talking about different things—it's paid sick days. Right at the beginning, this government spoke against paid sick days, then the federal government instituted a very minimalist approach to deal with that. That was criticized by this government. They received so much criticism, not just from the official opposition, who was echoing every day the need to put paid sick days—you're in the midst of a global pandemic, and people in my community are forced to say, "Do I pay the rent, or do I protect everybody by not getting on a packed bus and spreading illness?" They're

being put in this situation by this government. So now we've got three days.

More work needs to be done. I understand that you don't like criticism, and I want you to know that I have deep respect for each and every member of this government, through the Chair—despite it being a Thursday—and I want to say that you know what I'm saying. Look within your heart. Challenge the leadership. You know what needs to be done. Get it done.

Ontarians are counting on us, regardless of political stripe. There are so many things that need to be improved and fixed. Please do it. We're all counting on you. We're counting on you to do the right thing too.

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

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to the motion before us related to the extension of the reopening Ontario act powers.

My riding of Toronto Centre has been hit especially hard by wave after wave of this pandemic. Many people have become seriously ill. Many have experienced the trauma of loss of friends and family and loved ones. And so many have struggled with the isolation of never-ending lockdowns. We've also lost a lot of people in our community to this virus, and I want to express my sincere condolences to the families and loved ones in my community who have lost people in their lives in the last year.

I want to begin my speech today by sharing the story of one of the folks in our community who we lost to COVID-19 this year. It's important that we never forget the community members whose lives have been lost. We stand in this chamber every day and we debate how to respond to this crisis—paid sick days, what's going on in long-term care, making our schools safe, the botched vaccine strategy—but, at the end of the day, while we're in here debating and trying to hold this government accountable, people in our communities are dying.

Bontu Abdulahi was a personal support worker from my riding who passed away last spring. Bontu was 44 years old. She was an Ethiopian immigrant who raised two children in North St. James Town, which has seen one of the city's highest infection rates. She was devoted to her children: her son, Leymo, and her daughter, Biftu.

Last September, the Toronto Star released an article about the heartbreaking impact that Bontu's passing had on her 17-year-old son, Leymo. It reminds us that every person lost in this pandemic has left behind family and friends, chosen family, loved ones, who now all of a sudden have to navigate the vacant space that that loss has left in their lives.

Asokan Rasiah was the chef and owner of Peartree Restaurant. He passed away in January. Asokan was a feature in the Cabbagetown community for over 30 years. He first moved to St. James Town from Sri Lanka in 1988. On just his second day in Canada, he got a job as a dishwasher at a restaurant on Parliament Street. Not a month later, he was a line cook. Within six months, his passion for cooking had really ignited and he became a

chef. He loved the energy of the kitchen and worked as a head chef there for several years, until the restaurant's owners decided they wanted to sell. Asokan didn't hesitate to buy it, and from 1993, which was 28 years ago, he opened Peartree Restaurant in the location. He will be truly, truly missed and never forgotten. And I know that the folks in Cabbagetown miss him very deeply.

I want to share my sincere condolences to the family and friends of Asokan and Bontu and all of those we've lost to this pandemic.

There's no way for us to replace the lives that we've lost, but we need to start taking, and this government needs to start taking serious action now to ensure that as we're in the third wave now—hopefully starting to move out of the third wave—that we're not staring down a fourth and fifth wave because this government consistently refuses to listen to the advice of scientists, to listen to the advice of experts, to listen to the advice of the front-line workers of this province, or to listen to any of the calls that the official opposition has been asking for.

Speaker, I hear often from folks in my community that they're frustrated with this government's response to this pandemic, and I share their frustrations. It has become clear that COVID-19 has exacerbated the inequities in our communities, and it has revealed that there are problems here that have existed for years. COVID-19 is a disaster, but from an equity lens, there is no denying that the poverty in our communities, the underfunding of our health system, the underfunding and under-resourcing of our schools, the lack of good jobs and good salaries for PSWs in our long-term-care sector, that for 15 years under the former Liberal government—certainly things have gotten no better under the last three years of this Conservative government—our systems, our social safety nets, were allowed to crumble due to lack of investments, and our communities and our systems weren't able to withstand the brunt of this pandemic.

The work to do the emergency preparedness to get us ready for this never happened. Where were the implementations from the SARS report of the recommendations after SARS? What happened? We weren't ready. And this government has dropped the ball. We are now in our deepest, longest, most devastating lockdown yet, and folks in my community want to know what happened. Why didn't this government act earlier to save lives? Why did the Premier ignore the advice he received from experts? Why didn't he want to spend the money to protect our communities and to protect workers? He left billions of dollars on the table, unspent, unallocated COVID-19 relief money that could have gone into our communities, that could have gone into paid sick days, that could have saved lives.

I have to ask why it is that it's the people of Ontario whose lives we've lost who are the ones paying the price for the utter incompetence of this government and this Premier.

Speaker, people want this government to admit their mistakes and start fixing them. We need this government to start listening to experts and to get help where it's needed most.

1520

As I said earlier, people in my riding of Toronto Centre have been hit especially hard by the pandemic. Many people in my riding work as essential workers, and they've had to continue going into work during this pandemic. They've had to leave their homes, putting their lives at risk every single workday, to ensure that there is someone there to look after our seniors, to run our grocery stores, to drive our buses and keep our cities running. Unfortunately, these workers have not received the support or the respect or the permanent paid sick days they deserve and have been left to suffer the consequences of this government's decision to reopen businesses too soon, leading to further outbreaks in places, particularly warehouses and food processing plants. It has been devastating.

My husband works in a retail warehouse with about a dozen other folks up in North York. It has been terrifying every day for the last year to watch him get up and get in the car and go to a warehouse in North York—the immense risk that he has been at all year. When he got his first vaccine a few weeks ago, the relief I felt, that I didn't have to worry about him anymore—I didn't realize how much space in my body was that stress over my partner, who is an essential worker in this province, and how much stress I was carrying for him.

It's not just the workers; it is the people who love them, who are walking around every day in this province praying that their aunties and their cousins and their parents and their brothers and sisters who are essential workers are going to make it through another day. The weight of that is so heavy and completely unnecessary—if this government had done its job to protect workers in this province.

We know that in many cases, it is vitally essential for workers to go into work, for example, in health care, long-term care, grocery stores and pharmacies. But in many cases, there are workplaces that really shouldn't have been considered essential at all—I would argue my husband's workplace probably is non-essential—in large-scale manufacturing facilities, for example, like warehouses. Construction sites are a big one. The construction piece has been particularly upsetting for folks in my community who are working from home and trying to put their kids through online school. If folks have walked around or spent any time here in downtown Toronto, in the downtown east—it's not too far from the Legislature. I know many of my colleagues who travel in from other parts of the province have places they stay that are nearby; many of you have small apartments in my riding, so you shouldn't be unaware of how life is different for us here in downtown Toronto, just like how life is different up in the north. Context matters.

What does the pandemic look like for folks in Toronto's downtown east? We're incredibly dense. We have some of the most densely populated neighbourhoods in the entire country. St. James Town is the most densely populated neighbourhood in all of Canada. We are mostly vertical with high-rise buildings.

Do you know what it's like to be in a global pandemic and live in a 30-storey building when you can only have

two people on an elevator at a time, and what that's like trying to just get out of the house to get groceries or exercise—or what it's like when this government just assumes that, because their experiences are suburban or northern or rural, everyone has access to a giant backyard for fresh air and exercise and recreation?

We don't have those privileges in downtown Toronto. Most people in my community don't have backyards; many of them don't even have balconies. There's nowhere to go.

It has been entirely devastating for my community when this government made the decision to close outdoor recreation spaces and park facilities, because those are the only spaces we have. The only spaces we have are public spaces. We don't have backyards. It was heartbreaking. Where were folks supposed to take their kids to get any sort of meaningful exercise?

And then we saw this government vote down our motion last week to safely reopen outdoor amenity spaces, in line with recommendations from the science table.

There was no reason to deny folks in my community access to outdoor spaces.

It has been so difficult. It's not just that we're dense. It's not just the complications of the elevators. It's not just that we don't have access to outdoor spaces. It's also the physical size of our apartments. The average size of our downtown units is getting smaller and smaller every year, as developers try to cram more units into these ever-expanding developments. Most people I know are living in apartments that are 400 or 500 square feet or less. If you've got 700 or 800 square feet in my community, you're living life large. All of a sudden, imagine now that that's the only space you can be in. We live in small spaces downtown because—we joke—we're never home. It's the trade-off. You can live in a small space because, in normal times, you're never home. You go to work. You're gone all day. You come and spend maybe a few hours at home. You mostly sleep. We live downtown because we like to be close to the markets and the fairs and the festivals and the street life and the bars and the pubs and the restaurants. We eat out a lot. We love it. It's the culture of being downtown—that you never actually have to be in your apartment because there's always something going on.

But then what happened when we were all stuck in 500-square-foot apartments and all of a sudden nothing was going on—but now, not only that, you've got maybe two people.

Let's imagine you're in a one-bedroom apartment, a one bedroom plus den, and you've got a small child at home, and now both parents are working from home, remotely. Maybe one is working from a small desk in the corner of the bedroom, squeezed in next to the nightstand; maybe one is trying to work from the kitchen table, and you've got a seven-year-old trying to work on a laptop—three people in 500 square feet while the kids are trying to go to school. It was an impossible task.

Speaker, what brought me around to this was the construction piece. Imagine trying to do all of that—and the construction noise just never stops. Even worse, this gov-

ernment expanded the hours that non-essential construction could actually take place during the pandemic, as a favour to their developer lobbyist friends. So, from early, early, early in the morning—as early as 5, 6 in the morning—to late at night, non-stop, all day, while you're in your tiny little apartment with your screaming children, trying to get work done, you have no outdoor space to go to retreat to, and all you have going on all day is endless jackhammering. People are losing their minds in my community, and I don't blame them. The construction noise that this government has allowed to go on has been inescapable. You cannot get away from it. People have nowhere to go. We are expected to bear the brunt of the development that is going on in the downtown east, and we aren't getting access to the public spaces to offset the difficulty that goes along with those developments.

And there are no options. It's not like we have bigger spaces to move in to. People can barely afford to live in the spaces they're living in, which is another issue we've seen come up. The average price of a one-bedroom apartment in my riding is over \$2,000 a month. Even when CERB came in—CERB was never enough. CERB was \$2,000 a month. If your rent was \$2,100 and you lost your job because of COVID-19, what bills were you going to pay? Were you going to put them in a bowl, pick the bills out at random to see which ones were going to get paid this month? Were you going to pay your rent or were you going to pay your hydro? Were you going to put food on the table? Were you going to pay your Internet? If you didn't pay your Internet and your Internet got cut out, how were your kids going to do virtual school? These are the decisions that people in my community were forced to make, because over and over and over again, this government failed to come to the table and provide real supports that people in my community needed. You voted down every attempt we made at a reasonable eviction ban in this province. You voted against rent subsidies.

1530

Through you, Speaker: They voted against rent subsidies to help offset the cost to help prevent an eviction crisis in the pandemic. And when the eviction crisis did hit, do you know what this government did? They doubled down. They said, "We're going to pass a bill and make it even easier to evict people in a pandemic." They quietly passed Bill 184, rammed it through this House last summer, and then reopened the Landlord and Tenant Board in August, despite the fact that we were about to enter the third wave—and it has been devastating. Thousands of families in this province have lost their homes through no fault of their own because they lost their jobs because of a pandemic. And this government decided they were going to make it as fast and easy as possible for landlords to evict their tenants instead of providing people with the support they need. How did they do that? They took their Landlord and Tenant Board and took it online. What happened when they took it online? Human rights abuses. We were hearing from tenants who didn't have access to a phone or Internet or a computer to actually participate in their own hearing and defend their right to housing. We heard from people with disabilities who were

being denied in-person hearings to accommodate their disabilities.

I heard one horror story of a tenant who was forced to call in to his eviction hearing from London, Ontario, from a pay phone in the pouring rain, and when he couldn't take the cold anymore, he hung up and lost his housing as a result.

There has been no support for tenants to actually navigate the unmitigated disaster of this online, virtual eviction factory that they have created.

Even worse, the most shameful part is, they're sticking to their guns on this one. This government is planning to keep this chaotic, inequitable, online eviction factory running after the pandemic. They're going to double down and keep a broken system that has been called out by every stakeholder in the legal aid sector, by ACTO, by the FMTA. Anyone who does anything to do with tenants' rights has recognized how problematic this was, but this government doesn't listen.

Speaker, I see I'm almost out of time, but that's really the crux of the issue. No matter what it is, whether it's the eviction crisis, the pandemic, the crisis in long-term care, the lack of paid sick days or a failed vaccine strategy, this government doesn't listen. They don't listen to the people of Ontario, they don't listen to the experts, and they don't listen to the opposition.

So I'm demanding all of you today to do better and to listen.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Before I begin, I would just like to thank my fellow members on Ontario's official opposition NDP side: the member from Humber River–Black Creek—that was a tough act to follow—the member from Toronto Centre, and the member from London West for her hour lead. I would like to mention that because so far we have heard no speakers from the other side defending this bill. They've been completely silent and sat in their chairs when they've had an opportunity to debate. So I want to thank my fellow members for understanding that this is an important bill, and our voices need to be heard on this. Silence is not an acceptable response when the government is proposing a bill that gives themselves extraordinary powers and measures in the province of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, with that, I would like to add some more context to what we're debating today, and that is that we are in, as we know, a brutal third wave. We're in the middle of a brutal third wave that could have been entirely preventable, but what we see from this government is, despite having had all these emergency powers, having had all the power you needed to respond to this crisis, you have failed to do that. You've walked us, eyes open, into this brutal third wave.

We see the deaths that could have been prevented. We also see that our ICUs are overwhelmed. Our PSWs and our nurses are on the brink. They're talking about PTSD. They're talking about exhaustion. They're talking about crying in the locker rooms before and after work. The

stories that we hear, that we all hear, from the long-term-care commission are heartbreaking. We heard stories that I can't believe that we are talking about in the province of Ontario. Seniors died in long-term care not from COVID-19 but from neglect. They just needed water, and there was no one there to help them.

This is what happened under this government's watch while they already had these emergency powers that would have allowed them to prevent that. So while they're asking for more emergency powers, my question would be, what did you do with the powers you had before? They didn't help you. They didn't help the people of the province of Ontario. They didn't help you respond to the surgical backlogs that we have in the province of Ontario. I mean, they're extraordinary, the surgical backlogs. The FAO reports that we have 419,000 surgeries and 2.5 million diagnostic procedures that are backlogged. People are dying because of this. So you had the emergency powers, but this is what's happening under your watch.

I think it's really important to make this perfectly clear: While this government is asking for this emergency order to extend to the end of December, some of the measures that were put in place, for example like the PSW wage enhancement—that, by the way, not all PSWs working in the province of Ontario were entitled to—are going to expire on June 30, and the meager paid sick days that you put in place are going to expire the end of September. So you're asking for emergency provisions through to the end of December, but you're going to allow for some of these other provisions to lapse.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Just a reminder to direct your remarks to and through the Chair and not to direct them to the government directly. But about them is fine, through me. Thank you.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you for the reminder, Madam Speaker. I'm going to use the member from Humber River–Black Creek's Thursday afternoon excuse. I don't know how well that's working for you, but I'm going to use that as well.

Right now, basically we're looking essentially at what I would call this government's balance sheet on what they've done with their emergency powers. Really, what we see are winners and losers in this province. We have seen the government have all the power in the world to protect the most vulnerable in our province, to protect the little guys the Premier likes to talk about, but what is the result of this? On the one side of the balance sheet, we have small businesses. I mean, small businesses have closed by the thousands, tens of thousands in the province of Ontario, and they're not coming back. They close every single day still, with all the government's openings and closures and lack of a response to support small businesses. The failure of the small business grant program is known by everyone.

So we have, on the one side, small businesses that are suffering extraordinarily under this pandemic, but then on the other side what do we have? The member for Humber River–Black Creek, I'll be singing your song. We have Costco; we have Walmart; we have Amazon: extraordinary profits, billions in profits during this pandemic.

They were allowed to stay open during certain parts of this pandemic under the government's direction while small businesses were locked out. So there's the winner, the big, profitable corporations, and the losers were the small businesses in the province of Ontario.

I mean, 4,000 seniors lost their lives in long-term care in this province and 600—we forget that 600 people died in retirement homes in this province. On the one hand, we had these preventable, unimaginable deaths, and on the other hand, the other side of the balance sheet, we have the for-profit operators. We have the big corporations like Chartwell, like Revera, like Extendicare. During the time under their watch, people were dying needlessly. They were extending huge corporate bonuses, dividends and buybacks, underlining completely the notion that—why do we have profits in long-term care and retirement care? Why? Why would we allow our seniors to be less valuable than a profit, than a buck in this province? So winners and losers, and the losers in this case are our seniors and our loved ones living in long-term-care and retirement homes in this province.

1540

During this pandemic, we've heard so often that this government is using this as a cover to slip through, to push through an agenda that has got nothing to do with protecting people during the pandemic. And the environment is on the wrong side of this ledger. The environment and our natural heritage have suffered so much during this government's anti-environment, pro-development agenda. They're paving over wetlands for Amazon, actually. Those are the two sides of the ledger: allowing people to pave over wetlands in Duffins Creek, paving over wetlands now in my riding of Ancaster, issuing MZOs to allow this to happen. The environment is on one side of the ledger. What have we got on the other side of the ledger? We have well-heeled, powerful land developers and donors to the PC Party. It's a matter of record that these same people who are benefitting from MZOs in the province that allow them to pave over wetlands are the same corporate interests that are also now donating to the PC Party. Let's let the people of Ontario make the connection. This happened, they were allowed to pave over a wetland, and donations came into the PC Party. As my friend from Humber River–Black Creek said, "I believe in coincidences."

On the Premier's winners-and-losers ledger balance sheet, I'm going to say that there's no more vulnerable group that would expect their government to look after them that has been on the wrong side of this balance sheet than our children and our youth in this province. It's heartbreaking. It really, really is heartbreaking to see how they've been treated, how they've been overlooked, how they've been neglected by this government during this pandemic. They're vulnerable. They're our kids. They deserve the best from this government. They deserve for this government to step up, to understand how they are going to be impacted by this pandemic.

The government had all the emergency powers in the world that they needed to protect children and youth in our

province, and the outcome is that they have not. The mental health and well-being of our kids is on one side, and on the other side of the ledger, there are the cuts and the savings that this government has seen in education, in mental health. We see that they've refused to spend the money that we need and that we would have expected them to do to keep kids safe in this province. The mental health crisis is shocking. There's no other way to describe that. Mental health advocates, educators, parents, hospitals are sounding the alarm, and yet silence on the side of the government when it comes to this.

There's a group that is trying to make sure that this gets onto the radar of this government. They've identified this problem as #codePINK. Madam Speaker, you probably know in a hospital when you hear "code blue," we understand that's a cardiac emergency, but code pink is a term that's used in hospitals to declare a pediatric emergency. That's exactly what we have in this province. We have an emergency when it comes to our kids in this province.

Let me just share with you some of the statistics when it comes to our kids' mental health. This comes from the group, the #codePINK campaign partners. These are some of the stats: "Suicide attempt admissions have increased by 100% on average during the pandemic." At McMaster Children's Hospital in my riding, they reported a 200% increase. In McMaster also, the number of children who were actually admitted after a suicide attempt has tripled.

"Admissions for substance use disorders have increased by 200%....

"70% of kids aged six to 18 report that the pandemic has harmed their mental health....

"More children and youth are seeking emergency care. There's been a 61% increase in ER visits among children and youth from mental health conditions."

I'll just read some more, but it is overwhelming to understand that this is happening while we sit here in this Legislature and we hear nothing from the other side of this government. They sit silent in their chairs and don't even stand to speak to this bill that they're putting forward.

I'm going to just read—actually, why don't I read this quote from Dr. Cohn, who is the president and CEO of SickKids, who says, "Children's health and well-being are on the line now and their development into the next generation of adults is at stake if we don't act immediately."

From Bruce Squires, who is the president of the McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton: "Many of our children are in crisis. Prolonged social isolation, school closures and limited opportunities for interaction outside of the home are resulting in an alarming rise of patients coming to hospital with serious self-harm and mental wellness concerns. As a tireless advocate for child and youth well-being, McMaster Children's Hospital supports the call for strategic and sustainable investments to help reverse these concerning trends, and further protect young people from the devastating mental health impacts brought on by the pandemic."

They're calling for calling for investments. They're calling for resources. And the government is going the

opposite way. They've cut programs. They're cutting funding for children's programs. They're cutting in-school programs, despite the call from these experts that what we need is a whole-of-government response. We don't need a fractured response. We don't need to hear the empty words from the Minister of Education. We don't need to hear something that comes from the Minister of Health. We need the entire government. All of their ministries need to take a whole-of-government approach and stand up and resolve what is a devastating mental health crisis when it comes to our kids. Our kids are just not all right, and they should have nothing less to expect that their government would be stepping up and addressing this alarm.

But what we know is, in fact, that that's not the case. The government has cut mental health funding. They've cut community supports. In fact, now there is evidence that they are cutting a program that deals with some of the most severely troubled youngsters in our province. There's a program that's run by Syl Apps. It's a unique program, providing comprehensive mental health services to some of the province's most troubled, at-risk people, people who are already in trouble with the justice system. This program is closing. This closure seems to have been made without advance discussions with key partners, with ministries, including health and the Attorney General.

What's going on over there? How is it that this program could be cut without any kind of transparency, without any consultation with experts? It's just evidence that the one hand does not know what the other hand is doing and that when it comes to children's mental health, we need a whole-of-government approach. They need to have a summit. They need to take their emergency powers that they're asking for and use it to help our kids. But instead of that, we have a government that continues to use the pandemic as a cover for underfunding our education system, our public education system, in the province.

During this pandemic, as I said, our youth have suffered so much. I'm just going to read a quote from a young student who is part of a group of students who are petitioning this government to allow them to have a safe, in-person graduation ceremony. This young person said, "We've already given up so much of the teenager experience. We gave up dating and drivers' licences and sports and education. It's certainly compromised our education, and I think one last somewhat-normal event will make it feel like it was all worth it."

They have given up so much. I never thought about it. Because of how old I am, I never thought about giving up dating and the things and the normal events in a young person's life that they've had to give up, and they've given it up because, like everyone else in the province, they have sacrificed and they have done their part. But we see a government that doesn't seem to want to reward their suffering and reward them with an investment in their education.

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Online—oh, online dating. I thought we were referring to online education, but apparently we were referring to online dating; another thing I don't know too much about, Madam Speaker.

1550

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's Thursday afternoon.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's Thursday afternoon, yes.

At the beginning of this pandemic we pleaded with the government, experts pleaded with the government: "Spend the money to keep our kids safe. Reduce class sizes. Put a cap on class sizes. Have in-school testing. Fix the ventilation problems that have been so long-standing. Do what needs to be done. Spend the money to keep our kids safe."

But they didn't do it. We didn't do it. So we had to close schools because they weren't safe because the government wasn't prepared to do what they needed to do, because they would rather save a buck than save kids' education. We ended up with online learning.

What we know is that online learning doesn't work. It's not working for our kids. Parents who write to me or call me talk about kids' anxiety and stress. They say there's a lot of tears, there's a lot of frustration and there's a lot of anger. We all know what it's like to try and see your kids or your grandkids struggle through with online learning. It is not working.

A recent CBC survey has shown that 92% of educators that were surveyed worry about children's mental health. In my riding of Hamilton, roughly 70% of local educators said that some of those kids will never catch up academically. So not only is kids' mental health suffering, their academics are suffering as well. And now we have a Minister of Education and a government that's putting forward a permanent—permanent—option for remote or online learning.

There's no plan for a safe return to school. There's just this notion that we're going to have a hybrid model. Some people will learn at home; some people will learn in class. There's no plan, they haven't consulted with teachers, and in addition to cutting funding and flatlining funding, there are no additional resources to sort this out when we already know that it doesn't work.

I have a letter here from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board that says essentially they've been asked to come up with a plan, with no resources. They said, "We, as a board, have not had an authentic opportunity to consult nor provide feedback."

Does that sound familiar? All of the experts never get an opportunity to consult or provide feedback. The PSWs, the nurses, the teachers: All of our front-line workers never get an opportunity to tell the government what they know, because they are the experts in this instance. So it's great—the government loves their power and they want more and they want to use it, but at some point they have to make themselves accountable.

We have called for a judicial inquiry to look at the government's pandemic response, an actual, fully independent inquiry so we can figure out what the government has done with their power and what the government has done and hasn't done with their money. Maybe we can get an answer to why the government sat on billions and billions and billions in the middle of a pandemic. Maybe we can get an answer as to where the \$4.4 billion is that the FAO said seems to be unaccountable.

Nothing, if nothing—if they're going to ask us to hand over the keys to the castle—unlimited power—we should have a minister in the room who is prepared to stand up and debate this.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Yes, I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm rising on standing order 59 just to outline some of the business for the coming week; and if I may, Madam Speaker, just wish everybody a good week in their constituency and hope everybody will be safe; and just to thank everybody for what was a very, very, very busy and productive and ultimately very safe six weeks here in the Legislature. Thank you to all colleagues.

Just to beg forgiveness of the House leader opposite, there will be a lot missing in this report that we'll have to settle next week if we can. I'm only going to be outlining the PMBs today.

On Monday, May 31: PMB item number 91, from the member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, which is Bill 296, Retirement Home Justice and Accountability Act.

Business for the afternoon and the evening is yet to be determined.

Tuesday, June 1: The morning and afternoon are yet to be determined and the night is yet to be determined. The PMB will be item 92 for the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills, and that PMB has also yet to be determined.

On Wednesday, June 2, the morning, afternoon and evenings are to be determined. The evening PMB—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I understand that the member opposite is having some fun, but he might not be so entertained at the end of my standing order 59 as he is at the beginning of my standing order 59.

In the evening, the PMB, ballot item number 93 for the member for Humber River—Black Creek—a really wonderful PMB. I am certainly looking forward to this one: Bill 293, An Act to proclaim July 10 as Nikola Tesla Day in Ontario. I think that'll be a wonderful evening of PMB-ery.

On Thursday: morning to be determined, afternoon to be determined and then the evening to be determined. The ballot item number 94 for the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell has yet to be determined, Madam Speaker.

So there's a lot yet to be determined. Of course, much of the determination on this will come to light as this afternoon progresses into this evening, and as we get through this afternoon and well into this evening, then we could maybe shed some light on how the rest of the week when we come back will unfold, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member for Kiiwetinoong.

Hon. Todd Smith: Great tie.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch.

Meegwetch, Speaker. I rise to speak about the government's motion for the extension of the reopening Ontario act's powers. I've been listening all afternoon, and for the last 14 months or so, we've been addressing issues, the crisis, the pandemic, and how it impacts all of Ontario. I'm very honoured to be able to speak from the perspective of a different lens, a First Nation lens but also a northern lens, a Kiiwetinoong lens.

Speaker, we all know that we have to protect the health care resources and make sure that we are doing our best to follow public health guidelines to protect ourselves, protect our communities, protect our elders, protect our children. I know, of course, that we should be approaching the reopening of the province in a cautious way. I've just seen some reports or some updates that there are plans.

Speaker, I think we can all agree that safe outdoor activities are an important issue to discuss. For us, being outside is important to our physical, mental and spiritual wellness as human beings. Being from the north, in the riding of Kiiwetinoong, we know this. Outdoor activity is essential to who we are.

Our riding is 294 square kilometres with, I think, approximately around 33,000 to 34,000 people in the riding. It's a really massive area. I think one of the things that happened is that the science advisory table advised this government that maintaining social connections and outdoor activities are very important, again, to our wellness and mental health.

Interjections.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member. Stop the clock.

There's a lot of coming and going, and I realize that that is a natural part of the process. Could it be faster, please? I'm being distracted and unable to hear the member speaking. Thank you.

Hon. Todd Smith: Pick a chair. Pick a chair.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): And I appreciate the minister refraining from comment.

I return to the member.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker. I think it's important that we encourage safe outdoor activities, as long as we practise the issues of safe distancing and masking. One of the things that I've heard quite a bit from many constituents in the riding of Kiiwetinoong is about restrictions and how they have been restricted from the normal outdoor activities that happen in the riding of Kiiwetinoong. Many, many constituents wrote to express their concerns about crown land camping, the restrictions to the backcountry campsites and provincial parks. It's really important. I thank them for sharing how important these activities are to them, and not only that, but also to their families.

One of the letters said, "Pandemic response measures are impacting the people of Ontario. Nature-based activities like fishing and hunting are extremely important right now because they can be done safely within public health

guidelines while providing essential social, physical and mental health benefits. These activities are the safe outdoor escape that many people need right now to help with the increasingly heavy burden of a lingering pandemic....

"The same recognition should be given to crown land camping, boat launches and other outdoor activities that can part of the solution, not the problem, with COVID."

One of the things that I heard recently from the Sioux Lookout Chamber of Commerce is that they were concerned that there was no consideration being made for the circumstances of people across the riding of Kiiwetinoong. I'm just going to read part of the letter: "After crown land camping became prohibited under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, there was great distress throughout the communities" in the area of Sioux Lookout. "It is understood that crown land can still be used for activities such as exercise and recreation, but not overnight accommodation. The people of our region rely on camping as an escape, which is needed now more than ever due to the stress and adverse effects that COVID-19 has had on the mental health of all individuals. It is frustrating that this privilege has been taken away during a time when it's most needed."

When we talk about the restrictions, when we talk about this motion for the extension of the reopening act powers and some of the letters that I have read, these letters represent a small number of people who have reached out to share their frustration that they weren't being heard by this government.

One of the things I also heard is that many tourists across the region were frustrated by the lack of support for their industry. Yes, the Ontario Tourism and Travel Small Business Support Grant is a positive step, but it's one that happened too late in this pandemic for many businesses. We also know that thousands of people across Ontario lost their jobs because the Ontario government did not step up to help the industries that depend on tourism-based businesses, especially in our region in northern Ontario, where they pretty much depend on American business, American tourists. It's really important to say as well that the original Ontario Small Business Support Grant did not meet the needs of small businesses and many of them are struggling today.

I'm not sure if any of the MPPs have been to the riding of Kiiwetinoong. Kiiwetinoong consists of four municipalities and 31 First Nations. Twenty-four First Nations are fly-in communities—no road access. These First Nations are part of Treaty 9, Treaty 5 and Treaty 3.

For those who don't know, public health in First Nations does not work the same way as public health units in Thunder Bay, Sioux Lookout and Toronto. That's where we always talk about jurisdictional Ping-Pong when we talk about access to services.

I was talking to a group this morning, and they were talking about the Ontario-Canada two-step. It's almost as if we're in a different Ontario when we talk about the riding of Kiiwetinoong, because we're treated differently. I don't know if it's because we're brown, because we're First Nations—I don't know. Maybe it's the old colonial Indian Act that you guys follow. Maybe that's it.

Somebody messaged me a couple of hours ago, and I laughed at it at the beginning. Somebody tagged me on social media. It's from the north. There's a lady by the name of Jezebel Winter. She's from Wapekeka. It's a community of about 300 or 400 people there. This is her message to me—it's kind of funny, but it is kind of serious, too: "Can someone tell" the Premier "he has to have panties, men's briefs and socks as essential items. When ppl come out for medical they usually forget their panties and briefs." I laughed at that when I saw it, and I shared it. I've been getting lots of comments about it.

But I want to share that because in Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay—I was talking about the fly-in communities, right? When there's a medical emergency, you guys are entitled to ambulatory services. We don't have ambulatory services; all we have is Ornge. So you go to a nursing station, that nurse calls a doctor on call by phone and then the doctor calls Ornge to pick up whoever. Sometimes it's urgent; sometimes you don't have time to grab your clothes or whatever.

Back in 2015, there were 2,750 flights in these 24 First Nations that are fly-in. That's about eight to nine per day for Ornge to fly into these communities. Each medevac was about \$12,000 to \$15,000 back then. I don't know how much it is now. But that's our health care; that's our emergent care.

When they're talking about that, there are a number of things that happen if there's an emergency. Like, we have local stores. We don't have Walmarts. We don't have clothing stores. We don't have those types of things. We just have pretty much—I don't know what you call them—general stores. That's how they start talking about, when you come out for an emergency, then you don't have any place—because those are not essential items, and when you go to Walmart, all the clothing is blocked. When there's a newborn—when they leave the community when there's a newborn, we don't have these baby clothes that are up in the community, so there's no access to these items.

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There was another person who commented about when there are releases from jail and people are often displaced in the city until they can get home to their northern communities. Clothing is definitely necessary as they would come out of jail with literally nothing. These are the comments that have an impact. Somebody here who's deciding whether it's regional lockdowns or what essential items are, they don't consider the north: out of sight, out of mind. Because you don't live—you never grew up like us. You've never been up to Angling Lake, Wapekeka. You don't know how it is up there. I think it's important to talk about that just to share some of those stories.

I was talking about the public health system in the north, and I think what has really happened is the COVID-19 pandemic has further shed light on the challenges associated with that jurisdictional Ping-Pong, that jurisdictional ambiguity that exists within the system for those who live on reserve versus in an urban setting, and the lack of adequate resources to fully respond to public health emergencies such as this.

I spoke to a group of 31 First Nations this morning in the Sioux Lookout area, and they have their own health authority, the First Nations Health Authority. They have their own public health authority that represents and addresses the health needs. But one of the issues that they face is that the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority is not represented under the provincial legislation. It has no recognized authority over public health. That lack of provincial recognition results in the First Nations Health Authority being unable to establish and implement the regional public health system as requested by the leadership in these First Nations.

To be effective, especially in a pandemic, they need to access public health information, data, technical expertise and recognition by their partners by various sectors, which they cannot get without provincial authority over public health. Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority has been working to achieve public health equity comparable to the provincial boards of health, the health units, while developing a First Nations governance system that meets the needs of the communities and supports community-based public health laws and decision-making.

As an example, when I ask about anything health-related or First Nations-related to the government, they always just come back and talk to me about the vaccinations, the work that they did. I can't remember—the remote community that they did up north. The Premier did that to me a couple of months ago; the Minister of Health does that to me when she talks about that. But do you know what? The First Nations do not have access to that data. They don't even know how many people got vaccinated because it became provincial data because Ornge was the one that planned the rollout.

Then, of course, when you're in a First Nation community, the nurses—the copy of your vaccination goes to the nursing station, which is run by the federal. So First Nations are standing there and saying, "Where's my data?" Ontario has become an obstacle in this process. That's not acceptable when we talk about jurisdiction, and that keeps on happening. I think it's really important that we need to address some of the issues, some of the legislation, some of the regulations that prevent First Nations taking ownership of the systems that are there.

I know one of the things that's very clear, though, is that when I'm here trying to speak on behalf of First Nations, on behalf of Kiiwetinoong, I always talk about this, the oppression that First Nations face. I always talk about the colonialism that First Nations communities face. I always talk about the racism that exists within here and that continues to happen.

I'll say this: I remember asking, about two months ago, about what the plan was for the vaccination rollout for urban Indigenous people. The Premier happened to be sitting there. He got up and he started answering it. But he threw to me that the remote community rollout of the vaccines on the 31 First Nations—he started talking about that. One of the things that he said to me, I remember this distinctly, is he said the First Nations up north were "happy as punch." I replied, "They're not happy as punch."

There are people dying in these communities.” Then there are two things that he said: that I jumped the line and also the chiefs were unhappy and that I went to a community where I don’t belong. Those three things, at the highest level in Ontario, the highest political level—that’s colonialism. That’s oppression. That’s racism. It’s so clear, and that’s what people face. Just imagine if that was a person at a hospital, a person trying to access services in mental health. That’s the same thing that they face, what we saw that day. Meegwetch.

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

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you for this opportunity to participate in this debate on the motion to extend the orders and powers made under Bill 195, the Reopening Ontario Act, 2020. It would have been better titled the lockdown act. Those powers and orders made over the last year were set to expire on the first anniversary of the Reopening Ontario Act’s passing. Actually, prior to Bill 195, those emergency orders or powers would have actually expired within 28 days with the emergency act, but thanks to Bill 195, the Reopening Ontario Act, this government said 28 days wasn’t enough; neither was two months or three months or six months. No, this government needed a year to have their orders enforced without debate or a vote in this Legislature, a year of decisions behind closed doors without the scrutiny of this Legislature. And now, about two months before the expiration of the one-year anniversary, this government wants an additional seven months of emergency powers under the emergency act to continue their authoritarian rule over the people of Ontario, without scrutiny by this Legislature, without debate, without vote on the measures introduced. It is this very act that I voted against last summer and was promptly thrown out of the government caucus immediately.

Mr. Will Bouma: Hear, hear.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member for Brantford–Brant, come to order.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: The member for Brantford–Brant can really hold his comments. I’m glad to hear that he’s so happy to have overruling government powers. I’m sure his voters will remember that, come next election.

I think the act that gave a Premier these powers was an overreach, and I maintain that. The Premier and the government seemed insulted that I, as a member of this Legislature, would not just give up my voice or right to vote in representing my constituents to the Premier for a year. Here they are back again, 10 months later, asking for this power for another seven months. According to this government, members of this Legislature should get no vote or say on the emergency powers this government has declared or might declare in future. These extraordinary powers have to be debated and voted on, scrutinized regularly, not the way this government wants it, which is just once a year.

During one of my questions a couple of weeks ago, the Solicitor General took a swipe at me, saying she was going

to show me how to do my job. Well, let me inform the Solicitor General and every single government member that by supporting Bill 195 and supporting this motion for another seven months, it is they who are not doing their jobs. It is they who are abdicating their responsibility as members of this Legislature by saying with one vote that they aren’t interested in debating, scrutinizing or voting on emergency powers.

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That these members are happy to hand off their responsibilities in representing their constituents to the Premier, to do the job for all of them over the last 10 months and over the next seven months—apparently they’re all here just to get along, wave and smile at the cameras. Perhaps the Solicitor General and the government members should look in the mirror and think about what it is they promised to their constituents when they wanted to get elected and what it is that they thought their jobs were. Because if it wasn’t the basics—if their job wasn’t to vote, debate and scrutinize on laws that are put in force, and they decided instead that the Premier can make all of those decisions—what’s the point of any of them even being here in this Legislature?

Speaker, I’d like to take the opportunity to point out something curious about this motion springing up today. At the very moment this motion was being debated, the Premier—instead of debating and defending his request of this House to extend his one-man rule for another seven months; instead of defending his record over the next 12 months—conducted a press conference to let Ontarians know that, one day in the future, there will be a reopening. At the same time as he is talking reopening, he has his government passing a motion to give him authoritarian emergency rule for another seven months. What the government gives the people with one hand, it certainly takes with the other. This government has been a great example of that motto, and this afternoon is a great example.

We had no advance warning of this motion or debate. Instead of holding the debate and vote sometime in the next two months, closer to the one-year expiry, the government sprang it up today, just before a long weekend, to coincide with the Premier’s press conference. Apparently, the government members couldn’t be bothered to come back in the summer to pass further debate and vote on the emergency powers that they are requesting. They needed to get it done now, before a long weekend, perhaps so that they can enjoy their summers without being bothered by their obligations to this Legislature, while Ontarians struggle. It is no wonder that Ontarians are losing trust in government; look at how government is treating them.

Speaker, as this government is rushing this motion though, it’s important to note and review what has gone wrong for the last year by giving this government the power for this Premier to make closed-door decisions, micromanaging every minute aspect of the lives of Ontarians without the scrutiny of this Legislature. This government is asking us to give them this power without coming forward with a plan to reopen schools, because the Premier

says he has been given different opinions from his advisers. Apparently the Premier has requested these powers for another seven months, but isn't actually the one who's in charge, which begs the question: Why are we giving this Premier these powers when he isn't willing to take responsibility or make the tough decisions?

So—no plans for schools reopening. Let's look at some of the other items this government has refused to take responsibility for. There is no commitment from this government to ensure the OPP and children's aid are not threatening parents regarding how they parent their children on social distancing or masking. They won't take responsibility or address the draconian acts they've taken against churches that wish to pray in person—a total lack of respect for this. We have seen other jurisdictions and other countries such as the United Kingdom allow churches to gather, even during their most draconian efforts, but not this government—total contempt for the Legislature's role; total contempt for churches assembling in person.

We have finally heard the government wants to reopen outdoor activities, but of course only at unrealistically small numbers, arbitrary numbers for gathering, without any scientific justification to back these numbers up. These are just some of the examples of areas that this government has failed to address or take responsibility for as they come back today, right before a long weekend, asking for emergency powers—extraordinary, unprecedented powers—for an additional seven months. These orders and powers used by the government, along with the numbers they have arbitrarily come up with this afternoon tied to stages of reopening, need to be scrutinized and debated in this Legislature regularly, not every 10 months or seven months.

Speaker, I would like to conclude by saying that I was concerned about the precedent that we, as elected public servants representing the voters, have set and continue to set for our future generations on how our democracy operates and what our government can and cannot do, but it is clear that with this motion the precedent has been set: a truly unprecedented overreach of government; a power grab that we have never before seen in our 153-year history, and one that is not getting better, but is certainly getting worse from this government—who, again, cannot seem to help themselves, and they are definitely getting tired. These decisions continue to harm the livelihood of Ontario residents and their health. The cure is worse than the disease. And so, as Ontarians lose their freedoms, their jobs, their businesses, their savings, this government has also ensured the loss of their democratic system and their elected members representing them.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's a privilege, as always, to rise here and speak in this place on behalf of the constituents of the great riding of Davenport. I always feel very privileged to be here.

Before I begin the debate on this motion, I do want to mention, and a shout-out to, all of the 400-plus workers at

the Nestlé plant in my riding who, after some long negotiations yesterday, have reached a tentative agreement with Nestlé.

Interjection.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, that's Unifor 252. I want to say, those workers—and also a big shout-out to union president Jerry Dias and Curt and everybody on the bargaining team, because it's not every day you go up against a multinational corporation like Nestlé, one of the biggest corporations in the world. What these workers did—and I think it's consistent with this debate, actually—is they went against the powerful and they chose to stand up.

The majority of the workers there, over 400, are actually permanent employees. Many of them have worked there for many, many years, but they were willing to go on strike on the predominant issue of Nestlé's attempt to undermine the wages and opportunities for new workers. It really was something. And I'll tell you, while they were on strike, Nestlé suspended their benefits. They've managed to keep the workplace quite safe, I would say, but many of these workers still ended up getting COVID. Some of them are still on leave because of the long-term effects of COVID, and their benefits were suspended.

I want to congratulate everybody who was at the bargaining table on both sides for coming to this tentative agreement. It was wonderful to drop by the picket line this morning and congratulate the workers. We'll see if they decide to ratify the agreement, but I want to congratulate them and thank them again for their courage in this very difficult moment. They were out on strike for three weeks. Hopefully that will end soon. Congratulations, Unifor 252.

We are here to talk about the extension of emergency orders today, Madam Speaker, and as usual, without much warning from the government, we've come in here and—I thought what I would do is talk a little bit about how this government's mishandling of the COVID pandemic, and particularly the lockdowns and the reopenings and the lockdowns and the reopenings, have impacted people in my community, because it's been devastating. I know it's been devastating across the province; there's no question. There's not a corner of this province that hasn't been deeply impacted. But I thought I would share a little bit.

In this House, I have on many occasions raised the concerns of small businesses in my riding—small, independent businesses, predominantly. I've talked about the impact of the pandemic in terms of the “for lease” signs now that line the streets in my riding, streets like St. Clair West; Little Italy; Little Portugal on Dundas West; Bloorcourt; Bloordale; up as far north as Eglinton; Queen West; Ossington. These are areas of the city where people come from all over the GTA, actually, to go back to those cafés and those restaurants and those grocery stores that provide the connect back to, in many cases, their home—their home countries where they may have grown up or their grandparents grew up. It's really heartbreaking to see the loss of some of those businesses, both the long-standing ones and the newer businesses, which were just getting going. It's really quite heartbreaking.

I've raised them here and I've sent many, many, many emails to the minister responsible. My staff have worked

endlessly to try to advocate for many of these small businesses. Sometimes it's worked. Most times, we still have obstacles and we're still trying to jump through these hoops. This government likes to talk about red tape, but, boy, this small business grant program has been just a mess of red tape.

I want to share one letter that I received, because I don't think I've raised it in the House previously. It's from Amanda Armstrong, who is the owner of Mandala Design. I'm going to read this out to you. It's a women's clothing and accessory store on St. Clair West. First of all, I'll just start by saying she applied during the extended deadline, met all the financial and business eligibility requirements, but got a denial email. She was writing to me, going, "How is this even possible?" She also wrote to Minister Bethlenfalvy as well.

She says: "My business falls squarely into this category. I own a main-street level, independent women's clothing/accessory store on St. Clair West. I've had to close my shop intermittently for over the past year and my sales in 2020 plummeted to less than 60% of sales in 2019. I normally have staff of three to four; however, I've had to lay them off and rehire them twice already since the pandemic started. Now that we're shut down again, I'm not sure where this will leave us if my business is abandoned again by the Ontario government.

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"Clearly, the reason I was not approved is not the reason given. I have sent an email," and she talks about all the things she's done to try to get this grant, to try to correct this error. She says, "I would love to have a fighting chance at reopening in some real capacity once it's safe to do so, and this grant would go a long way to making that happen." Then she thanks us for everything we're able to do.

I've got to tell you, this is just one example in so many; and there are so many businesses, I find as well, that have been completely left out, like the whole maker sector: people who maybe don't have a shop, but go to the One Of A Kind Show or fairs. They make a living and they employ lots and lots of people. They're completely left out of this program. I have many of those folks in my riding. Unfortunately, again, it's just obstacle after obstacle. It's been extraordinarily frustrating, and I really think the government has failed in this regard.

I want to also talk for a moment about an issue very near and dear to my heart, which is the impact of this whole mismanaged reopening on kids and families. I've talked about that at great length here previously, but I want to reiterate again for the government that when the government came out and said, "You know what? We're going close playgrounds and we're going to card people"—people in my community and, I think, across this province still can't quite get over that. I know the government backtracked off that, but really, what it showed was this extraordinary disconnect not only from what are the real issues and priorities and what Ontarians have already given up, but especially what the science table is telling us, what all the experts are telling us.

For kids in my riding and across this province without backyards, for families who live in high rises, outdoor amenities are not just nice to have; they're essential. I spoke about this earlier this week in terms of my own community, my own experiences in the parks in our community, how important they've been. For people in little condos using public parks, using tennis courts and soccer fields, that's often the only place you have to get a bit of room. To walk and bike is great, but it's just not enough. So I'm really concerned about that.

We know that at the same time, children have been forced into these online courses. It's remote emergency distance learning—we get it—but they're stuck on a screen all day, and they need to play. I also want to mention that the impact of all this in this shift to online learning has been that in many respects, women are predominantly the ones—we know this—who are being forced to leave the workforce as parents and families are overwhelmed. We're seeing that increasingly.

I want to mention a little bit more about—I know some of my colleagues have mentioned this previously today, but myself and the member from University–Rosedale yesterday introduced a bill that asks the government to centre children, youth and young adults in their COVID recovery plans. I've got to tell you, Madam Speaker, this came at about the same time that some of Canada's top experts and advocates were uniting to talk about the crisis that our kids are in. They're speaking—very much so—about the mental health-related impact.

I want to just say anecdotally that I don't know a family at this moment with a child or a teenager or a young adult child who is not struggling to find mental health services for their children. I know families where parents have had to just stop everything they're doing for weeks and weeks on end to try their best to support their children, even their children who are in university or getting going on their own. The impact this has had, I think, has not really been adequately addressed or acknowledged by this government. So when we talk about this recovery, we need to be talking specifically about resources and programs, plans and policies that reflect the reality they're in and the very specific challenges that this generation is going to have.

We know that all around the world—UNESCO is calling people here in Ontario, some of our education, mental health, children, learning, etc. etc. experts, and saying, "Help us figure out a plan for the world," because this is a global issue. Is this government calling on its experts? No, they are not. They are not. It's not even on their radar. It is astonishing to me that this is a global issue, a global crisis, and right here in Ontario we have the expertise, and this government refuses—refuses—to just make that call and collaborate and come up with solutions.

I've got to tell you, before I get into the conversation a bit more about mental health, the issue is economic. The issue is economic; it's social. If we do not address these issues now, if we do not invest now in providing those mental health supports, those economic supports, the supports that those young people are going need, many of

them having now missed that crucial first job or first opportunity, we are going to be paying that price down the road 100%, without question. We will be paying for it in health care costs, in the economic costs, in the cost to government. Somewhere down the road, we will be paying this price. So there's an economic and fiscal requirement here to pay attention to this issue, and I'm really proud of the bill that we've brought forward because I think it proposes some really great tools that the government could use to actually move this forward.

Again, one of the things that was released yesterday when these advocates and experts united to declare #codePINK, one of the things they've noticed—and I've talked about this in this chamber many times—is that children's hospitals are reporting a 100% increase in mental health-related admissions. I'm not going to share my own stuff, but I'm going to tell you, anecdotally, in talking to many people that I know, where do you go right now? You've got a kid in crisis; where do you go? You've got no choice. You go to the emergency because it's that or you wait on a waiting list for months, a year, and any parent in this room—and many of us are parents or grandparents—we know, we will do anything to support our children. That is taking a real toll on our health care system because it costs a whole lot more too, I will tell you, Madam Speaker, to treat that child or youth in emergency than it does to actually provide the kind of community-based care they really need.

School closures, the lack of access to sports and recreational programs and social isolation are resulting in children being one of the hardest-hit populations during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the numbers are really staggering.

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I know the members opposite are having a good chat over there, but I hope they're catching some of this, because we're talking about our children and the impact that this is having.

Suicide attempt admissions have increased by 100% on average during the pandemic, and that's coming right from—McMaster Children's Hospital is reporting a 200% increase.

Admissions for substance use disorders have increased by 200% compared to just to last year, and the use of potentially deadly opioids has increased. This is all from Children's Healthcare Canada. Seventy per cent of kids aged six to 18 report that the pandemic has harmed their mental health—yep, things like anxiety, attention span. More children and youth are seeking emergency care. There has been a 61% increase in ER visits among children and youth for mental health conditions over the last decade, as I mentioned previously.

Surgical backlogs have increased. Surgeons are now suggesting it could take up to three years to address the backlog. We know that was—the government said we're going to start doing these non-emergency surgeries now again, but we are so far behind.

And of course, and this is really tragic, child abuse rates have risen very sharply, with a 100% increase in the cases

of infants presenting with fractures and head trauma. I want to mention, Madam Speaker, that this is also linked to what we are seeing, of course, with the number of women who are experiencing violence in the home, which organizations and agencies in my community are just completely overwhelmed with right now. They just cannot provide enough support. It is an epidemic, it is devastating and it has absolutely gone through the roof.

These are the kinds of issues that we see, and I urge everybody to check out many of the important materials that they've provided and anybody watching this to go to #codePINK and go online and learn about this campaign.

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I want to thank everybody: SickKids; Alex Munter, president and CEO of CHEO. I want to just read what he said here. He said, "Children and youth have experienced the pandemic in unique and relentless ways since day one." "Relentless" is a good word for it. "Prior to COVID-19, Canada had already slipped to 30th out of 38 developed countries for child health and well-being. Kids must be at the centre of Canada's COVID-19 recovery plans, for the sake of their futures and for the sake of our country's."

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I know, Madam Speaker, the members opposite have clearly more important things to talk about than what—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I am sorry to interrupt the member and I'm sorry that twice she's tried to defend her opportunity to talk. There's a conversation of five and another of three going on. If members have important things to say, by all means, all members have the opportunity to stand in rotation during the debate. But right now, the member from Davenport has the floor. Please stop. Thank you.

Please continue.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to talk a bit about that issue of surgeries, because I have heard from many, many people in my community who had their surgeries cancelled and I want to share that with members here. I know we've all received these emails and calls. Our leader, Andrea Horwath, the leader of the official opposition, has called on numerous occasions for the government to address that backlog.

I want to read to you from a situation that was brought to my attention. I'm not going to read the name, because I don't have the permission of the woman who she's referring to here. She says, "I've watched you advocate for so many issues and I'm hoping you can add one more, as I would really appreciate it. Due to COVID, many surgeries have been cancelled in hospitals. My 34-year-old niece was set to have her ovaries removed to lower her estrogen level. She was diagnosed with stage 4 metastatic cancer and has had chemotherapy treatment, but was ready for the ovary removal as an additional life-saving surgery. The devastation of the cancellation is a lot to bear, and now she must wait as this is in the government's hands."

I want to say, Madam Speaker, I think we all know stories like this. We've all heard these. Maybe we have

people close to us who are going through similar things, and it's been devastating. I think it's really important we talk about what are the surgeries and the nature of the kind of surgeries that have been missed here and what the potentially life-threatening implications of that are for a 34-year-old woman. So I wanted to read that into the record.

The Financial Accountability Officer has reported that there will be 419,200 surgeries and 2.5 million diagnostic procedures backlogged in Ontario by September. So I'm glad we're getting this moving again, but boy, we have got a long way to go.

I've only got a couple of more minutes left, so I want to shift to another letter that I received. This one is about the vaccination rollout. Madam Speaker, in my community, we have four hot spot postal codes. Many other people, though, in my community who are not falling under those hot spot postal codes are essential workers, and it has been like *The Hunger Games* to find out where a vaccine clinic has been operating. We post it every day. We post updates to our websites. Then we send out voice broadcasts and we knock on doors and we drop off leaflets and we put up posters. It is just unbelievable how this is being mismanaged. It is excruciating. I know the members opposite like to always blame the vaccine supply issue, and that's definitely been a piece of it, but what a nightmare this has been.

This person is saying, "I know there are probably many people reaching out to you and advocating for their need for a vaccine, but after all the media attention about pregnancy and COVID-19, I am feeling the anxiety of being an unvaccinated pregnant individual. I have been deemed an 'essential worker.' I own a small business located in the M6N area code, which is a hot-zone neighbourhood. I take transit every day with my two-year-old who goes to daycare in the same hot-zone neighbourhood. My husband works in residential construction. We don't have the luxury of staying at home." She's 22 weeks pregnant. She's creeping closer to that third trimester, and she says, "I am becoming increasingly more anxious. To be honest, I feel like a sitting duck."

We're working really hard to get her and her family vaccinated, but I've got to tell you, we should not have to be chasing these vaccines down at this point.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank you and thank everyone who was listening for their attention and urge the government to do better. We cannot afford a fourth lockdown.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: I don't have any prepared remarks today because I didn't know that this motion was going to be called until the afternoon. I am shocked again that seemingly despite the progress that this government purports to have done by way of its fight against COVID, it seeks to effectively extend the lack of any parliamentary oversight over its own actions by bringing this motion today. It's shocking and it's so very sad for our democracy.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud to be seated on this side of the House. I started in this very seat when Parliament first convened, and I'm back. And I couldn't be more proud to be back, because I looked at myself in the mirror around January 12 or 13 and I said to myself, "What is going to happen to me 10 years from now when I think back to this time, when I think back to the opportunity I had to effect a change?"

Laughter.

Mr. Roman Baber: I see some members—unfortunately, I don't have my glasses with me. I see the member from Carleton laughing. I see the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook. Is that Etobicoke–Lakeshore? The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. They find it funny. The fact that I grappled with my conscience for what this government is doing to Ontarians: The member from Flamborough–Glanbrook finds that funny.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Point of order.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: The member is imputing motive—that is inappropriate—and making comments—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I hear the member. I will—

Interjection.

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

All members are reminded that they cannot suggest that they know what a government member or any member is thinking. They can't impute motive. But by all means, members are able to comment on what is happening in the Legislature.

I return to the member from York Centre.

Mr. Roman Baber: Madam Speaker, motive is the reason someone does something. However, when you describe someone's conduct, that is not motive; that is a characterization. I believe that my friend from Carleton is a lawyer, even though she's presently suspended. But I'm sure that if she's back to practising law, she will maybe undergo that training again.

I had to grapple with the decision of what's going to happen a number of years—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Stop the clock. I will admit that I was not attending to what was happening in that moment.

Mr. Roman Baber: I sat down. I couldn't hear myself talk.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Okay. I've confirmed that the member does indeed still have the floor, but I'm going to have the cross-talk stop. And if anyone is unable to handle that, I would encourage them to perhaps take a walk.

I return to the member from York Centre with a reminder that—no, there is no reminder. Go ahead. Thank you.

Mr. Roman Baber: It's too bad that this government is unwilling to hear the truth. It's too bad that they're unwilling to face the consequences of what they've done.

1650

This morning in question period, I cited a report by the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network that was issued yesterday. It was conducted together with St. Mike's hospital and was, in fact, referred to by the Minister of Health this morning. The report concluded that more than 500 additional Ontarians died from overdose in the eight months concluding 2020. From March to December 2020, there was an increase of 75% in overdoses. The mental health crisis perpetuated by the lockdown is of enormous proportions. Compare that figure of 500 people between the ages of 25 to 44 to merely 150 people who tragically passed away from COVID between the ages of 20 to 50. You see, the premise of my argument, the premise against these orders and the premise of my argument against this government has always been that, acting reasonably, a lockdown is generally deadlier than COVID. Yes, COVID is a very serious infection. It's an interesting infection. Why don't you guys go and learn what COVID actually does?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Through the Chair.

Mr. Roman Baber: It's the first time we're seeing an effect on folks with diabetes. We're seeing that metabolic conditions give rise to an odd reaction to this respiratory virus, but we're also seeing, generally speaking, who the virus affects. But instead of focusing protection on the vulnerable, instead of getting long-term care right a year into this pandemic—which in fact resulted in more deaths during the second wave than during the first wave—this government continues to lock up 15 million Ontarians and make them sick. Because that's what the lockdowns do: The lockdowns are making healthy people sick, which is why we have a crisis in health and mental health. Let's talk about it.

We have a million cancer screenings that didn't happen because of the fearmongering of this government. Can you imagine the resulting repercussions from a million cancer screenings that didn't happen? And cancer screenings are not random; it's for folks that are looking for cancer, potentially, given their age and predisposition. We're going to have more folks die from cancer, undiagnosed cancer, than die from COVID—probably under the age of 70. This is inexcusable. We're going to have a tsunami of cancer, which is what the director of Princess Margaret hospital described in the letter that I quoted.

We have 270,000 surgeries delayed. I have constituents from other ridings reaching out to me daily, telling me about their cancer surgery being delayed. In fact, there was an article yesterday about a woman who's not sure if the third delay is still going to stand or if she's going to be able to get her surgery next week. It's in today's media. She wasn't able to get a phone call. I took her phone call. Her condition should concern everyone in this House. And those are surgeries that are not urgent surgeries. They're surgeries that are deemed not urgent at the moment, but could develop, God forbid, into something very, very serious. But the government cares not for that. They don't care about the 260,000 surgeries that they delayed. They

don't care about the million cancer screenings that didn't happen. They just care to satisfy the political correctness, the political mood that we're in today that says that all other health conditions don't matter anymore. Mental health doesn't matter anymore. Cancer doesn't matter anymore. The only thing that seems to matter is COVID.

But even on that, they're failing, because a year later, we know—my first question to the Minister of Health when I was sitting on this side of the House was how many homes already have infection control in place. She didn't know the answer. I asked her how many homes are short on staffing. She didn't know the answer. In early January, the Premier had had an opportunity to bring in the Canadian Armed Forces to save lives, and he opted not to do that, because he didn't want another report. This is again another example of this government putting politics before policy, politics before people.

One of the greatest tragedies we've suffered, other than loss of health care, is the mental health implication on all Ontarians. In the week before my letter, I heard from a constituent of mine. He asked me to deliver a letter to the minister of heritage, culture and sport. One of his employees, a mother of five, tried to take her own life. I delivered that letter on his behalf on the weekend before I was ousted from caucus. On the Monday, before I was ousted on the Friday, I had another constituent call me who told me that his mom's heart surgery—it was a valve replacement surgery—was cancelled, because the hospital couldn't guarantee a bed, even though the hospital had beds. They saved a hospital bed for a computer-modelled patient who could have arrived that night, except that as I've demonstrated multiple times, Ontario's health care capacity in 2020 and 2021 is better than it has been historically. ICUs perform optimally at 80% to 85%, and that's where we are roughly. In fact, we barely exceeded the 80% mark for most of this year and most of last year. It is remarkable.

I've demonstrated using Ministry of Health numbers that our overall health care capacity is better than in the prior three years. Despite that, the government seems intent on following modelling which proves wrong time and time again, and it's on the basis of this modelling that the government engages in remarkable decisions.

I brought a number of examples of this because people say, "Well, Roman, if we didn't do the lockdown, then the numbers would be much higher and the hospitals would be overwhelmed." But no, that's not what I'm saying. I'm not saying that the trajectory of cases is wrong, although that is often wrong as well. It's the anticipation of the hospital response and the death in response to those cases. In other words, they never know what to actually factor the number by. Let me give an example.

Just before the fall preparedness plan, Dr. Brown came before the people of Ontario and said, "Look, today, we have about 80 people in ICU, and if we meet the trajectory that Michigan is on, then we're going to have over 250 people in ICU by the end of October, for Halloween." We did, in fact, meet the trajectory. We did meet the case trajectory, but the number of people in ICU was about 85—sorry; about a month and a half earlier, it was about

40. So we meet the trajectory that they're worried about by way of cases, but we don't meet the trajectory of hospitalizations and of deaths.

Anyone who's reasonably looking at the situation would understand a very simple proposition: It's not about how many cases we get of COVID; it's about who gets COVID. You can't extrapolate a COVID case, multiply it by a number of COVID cases and say, this is how many hospitalizations we're going to have. No, you can't, because generally young people do not suffer the very same consequences as our elderly, as the vulnerable, as folks in long-term care. So we need to focus protection on those who actually need it instead of continuing with this blind lockdown that has such detrimental effects on Ontarians.

Perhaps one of the key reasons, the main reason, behind my letter to the Premier against the measures and against the very same measures we're voting on today, is the effect on kids' mental health. We hear from the Canadian Paediatric Society almost daily. We're hearing that attempted suicides at McMaster's Children's Hospital are triple. We hear that CHEO is out of space. We do have a health care capacity crisis; it's in mental health is where it is.

It's shameful that these government members continue to come here every day—or most of them don't even come here every day and still don't take constituency calls, because they're afraid and embarrassed, and yet they seem to simply not care. In fact, with respect, that would be true for almost all of my friends from all recognized parties.

How can we not put children first? We've always done that. We're a civilized, developed western democracy. The kids are not all right. The doctors are telling you that every day. Just before I walked into this House, I saw the Children's Health Coalition, including CHEO and SickKids, saying the schools must be opened immediately. What do we hear instead? The Premier saying, "Oh, the teachers' unions—the teachers' unions are threatening me with an injunction, so I'm not going to open the schools." What is that? Open the schools.

I heard from so many parents in the week before my letter: My kid is anxious. I don't recognize my child. My kid is overeating, or my kid is not eating at all. We know from SickKids that there's a shadow pandemic of eating disorders, but that is of no interest to this government apparently.

All I'm asking for is a fair weighing exercise. I'm not saying forget COVID. I'm not saying let's leave the situation. I'm saying let's look at the toll of the pandemic, at the cost of the pandemic, at the health—whether it's the surgeries missed, the cancer screenings missed, the mental health effects, the overdoses, and let's weigh that in our public policy response. Just like we would make a medical assessment: Is the cure worse than the disease? If we were to make that assessment, then perhaps we should reassess.

1700

The problem is this government never actually came down from the narrative that it started perpetuating about a year ago. I agreed with the first lockdown. I was one of

the greatest proponents. I introduced this government to one of the key doctors who is currently advising this government on the COVID table. I brought him before the chief of staff in mid-March. He said, "We are going to have a disaster here." We knew that we were in a bad situation in March and April. But we've learned so much since.

For me, it was in May when Stanford University came out with a report that the infection rate is about 50 times cases. In other words, for every person in the United States that has COVID, 50 more have not been tested. I said, "This is great news," because that means that the disease is so common that all the metrics that we're actually worried about, like hospitalizations and deaths, are 50 times lower.

I brought that to the attention of the government. I brought that to the attention of public health. I asked them to make a key distinction, a distinction that over 80% of people who regrettably passed away from COVID during the first wave were in congregate homes, in long-term-care homes, in retirement homes. And I asked Dr. McKeown. I said, "Is that not a meaningful distinction, that more than 80% of the people who are dying here are in long-term-care homes? Is that not important? Is that not something to consider?" The response was, "Well, the more common it is in the community, the more likely you are to bring it into a home." What utter nonsense.

We have health care workers—we have workers still going from home to home. All it takes is one worker to bring in COVID for, God forbid, a disaster to ensue. And they still can't institute infection protocol and control, and instead are locking everybody up.

When we failed with this distinction that more than 80% died in congregate homes, we stopped engaging in one of the most important medical processes there is. It's called "triage." When you show up at a hospital, when you show up before a doctor, the doctor looks at you and says, "Who are you? What are you? What are your characteristics? What is your predisposition?" We stopped doing that.

COVID: We keep saying that we want to keep kids safe. The Premier just makes such remarkable comments about that. The kids are not safe from this government. The kids are not safe from the mental health crisis that this government has subjected them to daily. And why? I'm going to conclude with the minute and a half that I have as to why this is happening.

I know that most of these members, if not all of these members, know the catastrophe that they're perpetuating. And yet, they sit there, guarding their PA-ships, guarding their ministerial portfolios, guarding their seats, thinking they're going to get re-elected. They won't have the courage to sit here right next to me. Why not?

Monte Kwinter, my predecessor, who occupied this seat for 32 years, voted against Premier McGuinty in 2006 on a matter that was very, very important to my community. He fell out of favour with the Premier and he lost his ministerial portfolio, but he maintained his dignity—God bless Monte Kwinter—and he was rewarded by my community for the following 15 years. Again, he served for 32 years.

No, they will not admit they're wrong, because admitting they were wrong will mean that everything they've done for the last eight months has been a deadly mistake. That's why they won't do it. They never admit they're wrong until it's too late, and then they will fold. Whether it's Taverner or licence plates or class sizes or autism—it doesn't matter what it is, they will fold, because it's only a matter of time until the incompetence and the utter insanity of what they're doing is going to be revealed.

I'm proud to be seated on this side of the House. Shame on these members for not doing the right thing, and putting themselves first.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member from Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Chris Glover: Spadina-Fort York.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Spadina-Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, the name changed after the last election.

Let's see. It's an honour to rise here today to talk about this motion. It is a motion that I'm very concerned about, but before I get into my remarks, I just want to give a shout-out to so many people in my riding who are helping others to get through this pandemic. I want to give a shout-out to the Chinatown BIA, all the members, but in particular Simon Zhong and Bill Hong, who donated two truckloads of hand sanitizer to community groups in the city of Toronto and two truckloads to a number of other communities across this province. That generous donation is helping to keep people safe through this pandemic. So thank you very much to the Chinatown BIA and to Simon Zhong and Bill Hong for your generous donation.

I also want to thank Spadina-Fort York Community Care Program and the hundreds of volunteers who are working diligently to help people get through this pandemic. The Spadina-Fort York Community Care Program now feeds 1,500 people a week through three different mobile food banks. It also runs a seniors' food delivery program on Sundays. It helps people without homes. There's a group of Chinese seniors that it's also helping as well. They are doing an incredible job.

The other thing that they've taken on—they're now helping people to register for vaccines. They're registering about 700 people a week for vaccines, helping people to navigate through this vaccine protocol to get their registration. I just want to give a shout-out to the Spadina-Fort York Community Care Program and all of the volunteers who are making it happen.

Today, we're debating a motion to extend the emergency orders to December 1. The government has the power to issue this motion. Under the powers of Bill 195, which was presented a year ago—Bill 195 was very controversial, and I'll talk more in detail about it. I'm going to argue that the government should not have given itself the emergency order powers that it did under Bill 195, and that the use of those emergency orders is a violation of the democratic rights of the people of Ontario.

But before I get into those remarks, I'm going to tell a brief story. This one takes place on a farm, so I'm going to dedicate it to my colleague from Timiskaming-Cochrane. I'll also give a shout-out to the member from Perth-Wellington, because I believe you are also a farmer, if I'm right—yes; okay. You'll appreciate this story. It's a story about a strand of barbed wire and a two-by-four.

In the early 1980s, I was on an exchange program. They were eight Canadians and eight people from Sri Lanka. We were all partnered up, and my Sri Lanka partner and I were posted to a dairy farm just outside of Binbrook, Ontario. We worked on the farm. It was one of the best experiences of my life. We were working long, long days because dairy farmers work—all farmers, but dairy farmers work extremely hard, and we were also eating really well. In my three months on that farm, I actually put on 25 pounds. I went in as a scrawny kid and I came out pretty much the weight that I am today. So I certainly appreciate that.

But there was one point, when we were working on the farm, that my Sri Lankan partner and I were walking across the field and we had to climb over a fence. The fence had a two-by-four nailed on its side, from post to post, and at about 16 inches over the two-by-four, there was a single strand of barbed wire. I put my left hand on the post and my left foot on the two-by-four, and I swung my right foot over this barbed wire and put it on the two-by-four.

It was at this moment, when I was in that very precarious position—I don't know who put that two-by-four up, and I don't know how long it had been there, but at that moment, the two-by-four cracked, it split, and I started to fall. Thank goodness the survival instinct kicked in, because I was able to roll off, and although the barbed wire cut my leg, there was no other damage done at that point.

I see some people laughing.

The reason that I'm telling this story is that I'm going to talk about our democracy in terms of that two-by-four that you depend upon to help you through precarious positions, that it's really important to make sure that we maintain the strength of our democracy. That's going to be the gist of my remarks today.

1710

When I think about the democracy in this Legislature—when I was first elected in 2018, I had a long conversation with the member from Timmins. He's been here for 30 years, like you, Mr. Speaker. I believe there are three of you who have been here since 1990. He was telling me stories about the Legislature and the role of democracy in this Legislature. He said that in the 1970s and early 1980s, when Bill Davis was the Premier, the opposition had the power to filibuster. So if the government wanted to get through a piece of legislation, they had to work with the opposition parties. He said that the government House leader at the time would sit down with the opposition House leaders, and the government House leader would say, "Look, we want to get these four bills through before Christmas. What's it going to take?" And the opposition would say, "Well, look, these bills are okay," or "This one

is okay, but we want you to make these amendments. This one we don't really like, but we can live with it, so we'll argue it, we'll debate against it, but we'll let it go through. And we want this other piece to go through." So there was a bit of back and forth.

But the beauty of it was that it was a true Parliament. The idea of this place is that we're supposed to be conversing back and forth. Each of us, in the 124 ridings that we represent, brings a different perspective and different understanding of the needs of the people of this province and a different vision of how it should go forward. We should be working collaboratively in deciding on the vision and the direction of this province.

What has happened since then, though, is that there has been this slow, steady erosion of our democratic process in this House. It starts with omnibus bills. I will criticize this government, because almost every bill it brings is an omnibus bill. An omnibus bill is a bill that deals with multiple unrelated issues in one bill, and it's almost impossible, as a member of the opposition, to focus on one particular issue. There may be some things in the bill that are good and other things that are not good. The problem is that the media doesn't catch it. The opposition will know what's good and what's bad in those bills, but it's very hard for us to have a real public debate about the bills.

Then we get into this kind of political game-playing. One of the things that happened—for example, Bill 257 was passed recently. For the most part, the first two schedules of that bill are about expanding broadband to rural and remote communities, particularly in northern Ontario. This is a need that is desperate across this province, because we all need access to broadband. So those two schedules of the bill, we in the opposition—in fact, all the opposition parties—really supported those two schedules.

The third schedule was a schedule that retroactively made an MZO legal, because the government had gotten a legal opinion that a couple of the MZOs that it had issued to tear down heritage properties and to pave over wetlands breached their legal obligations under the environmental act and the heritage act to consult with communities before those were actually passed. So in order to retroactively make them legal, they stuck this schedule onto what was otherwise a good bill.

Then what happens in the House here is we often hear, "The opposition, the NDP, voted against broadband." We never voted against broadband; we were fully supportive of expanding broadband. But what we didn't support was retroactively changing the law to make an MZO legal that had initially been in breach of the environmental act and the heritage act. So omnibus bills are part of the erosion of our democratic process here.

The other thing that's a part of that is committee consultation. Committee consultation is where we pass a bill through the first and second readings in the House here, and then it goes to committee. Committee is an opportunity for people from across the province who are interested in that particular issue or who have expertise to come and speak to the MPPs about that legislation and give us insights about what's good or what's not good in that bill

so that we can improve that legislation. But the government has changed the standing orders so that they can rush through legislation really, really quickly.

I'll give you one example. Sometimes the legislation has been rushed through so quickly that the committee had no ability to advertise that the second reading vote was the same day as the deadline to request to appear; for example—and I know that may not have been that clear—Bill 108, the More Homes, More Choice Act. The second reading vote was on May 29, after question period. The deadline to the request to appear was May 29 at 1:30. So there was a one-hour window in which people who wanted to speak to that bill could apply through the legislative process to speak at committee—a one-hour window. So unless you were sitting by the phone, watching that vote, it basically made it impossible for people to be able to come and speak to committee, and that also is an erosion of our democratic process.

The overall argument that I would make is that we need to strengthen, not weaken, our democracy. Weakening our democracy through these omnibus bills and not allowing people to speak at committee, it's like—you know that two-by-four that I told you I was straddling at one point? It's like taking a saw out to that two-by-four, and every day you just run the saw once back and forth and then you go—you just keep doing it over and over, and eventually that two-by-four, which I will say represents democracy in this metaphor, collapses and just breaks, and then we're all in a very precarious position.

I am a member of the New Democratic Party. This is not a new party; in fact, this party is 60 years old. But part of the attraction for me to the New Democratic Party is that it believes in a new kind of democracy, one that is more inclusive of everybody and that gives more and more people a voice in the decisions that are going to affect their lives. One of the things that I strongly feel is that we need to change the first-past-the-post democratic system. We need to go to proportional representation. Because the current government—the Conservative Party in the last election got 40% of the vote but they have 100% of the power. So they don't really have the democratic mandate, but under our parliamentary system, they have an absolute power to do whatever they want for these four years, even if it breaches the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as we saw—and I'll speak more to it later. They can use the "notwithstanding" clause to breach the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the people of Ontario.

Bill 195 was passed a year ago, and it gives this government the power to extend the emergency orders. It used to be, under the emergency act, the government could extend the emergency orders, but they had to come back to the Legislature every three months in order to renew those emergency orders again. The government gave itself the power to extend those emergency orders for a year at a time, and just come back once a year. And this was so offensive to some members of the House that the member from Cambridge, who was a Conservative at the time, voted against it, because she felt that it—actually, I won't impute motive. She argued at the time that this was a breach of the democratic responsibility. The member from

Cambridge and I have very different views on most issues in politics, but I admire her strong and principled stance to protect the democracy of this province by not supporting Bill 195, which basically gives the government the power to rule by fiat through these emergency orders for a year at a time in perpetuity. That is a real attack on our democracy, and Bill 195 does need to be repealed.

Bill 195, when it was passed, was also opposed by a number of the unions because it gives the government the power to override collective bargaining rights. The Ontario Federation of Labour, which represents 54 unions and one million workers in Ontario, said that the “Conservatives’ proposed Bill 195, giving themselves special powers and reducing public oversight of emergency orders, will undermine democracy and workers’ rights....”

“‘Bill 195 must not go forward. It is a blatant and unfettered power grab by the’” Ontario “‘Conservatives; a bid to give themselves carte blanche to skirt their democratic responsibilities,’ said OFL President Patty Coates. ‘In crises, public accountability is more important than ever. There are already legislative processes for extending emergency orders as necessary to protect the health of Ontarians. This government has used emergency orders to undermine collective agreements instead of legislating decent work laws that would create permanent improvements in health and safety in our province.’”

1720

CUPE president Fred Hahn said, “The ... Conservatives’ proposed legislation” on Bill 195 extending “emergency order powers will give the province significant powers at the expense of front-line workers.”

Candace Rennick, the secretary treasurer of CUPE Ontario, says, “Emergency orders and the power to make immediate decisions to defend against a public health crisis are supposed to be temporary.”

This bill, Bill 195, should never have been passed, and we should not be now debating a motion to extend these emergency orders using the powers that the government gave itself through Bill 195.

And I’ll give you one other example of the abuse of these emergency orders: the noise bylaw. One of the emergency orders the government issued was to override the city of Toronto’s noise bylaw, and so now, construction noise can take place between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. A year ago, when the government introduced this emergency order, they said this was to build field hospitals and other emergency structures that would be needed if our hospitals got overrun, but they applied it to all construction projects happening, and they have never revoked it. So right now, between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m., construction can happen in the city of Toronto. It is driving some of my constituents crazy, because at 6 a.m.—and sometimes the trucks are

lining up at 5:30 a.m.—the construction noise starts. We have a stay-at-home order, so these people are forced by law to stay at home, and at the same time, the government has overridden the noise bylaw.

I can tell you, I phoned a resident one time, a constituent, a while ago. They were complaining about the construction noise. I phoned them up, and there was jackhammering outside of their condo. It was so loud that they had to step into the corridor so that we could actually have a conversation, and this was during the stay-at-home order, which we’re still under. Can you imagine being stuck in your condo or in your apartment and there’s jackhammering going on outside that can start at 6 a.m. and go to 11 p.m.? You think about the mental health impacts on the residents of this city and of this province. This was never necessary. This is not emergency construction. This has nothing to do with the pandemic. It’s just regular construction, so there’s no need for this order.

A year ago, I wrote an article for Now Magazine about Bill 195. I wrote: “Last month” the Conservative majority “gave themselves the power to govern through emergency order.

“Bill 195 was rushed through the Legislature in the middle of the summer under cover of a global pandemic while” the Premier “was on a tour of southwestern Ontario.

“Some took notice.

“The usually” Conservative-friendly “National Post’s editorial called the passage of emergency powers ‘an unjustified violation of our Charter-protected rights.’

“The Canadian Civil Liberties Association labelled it as ‘a grab for more permanent emergency powers while cutting democratic controls.’

One Conservative MPP, the member from Cambridge “to her credit ... stated that ‘at its core, Bill 195 takes away the Legislature’s ability to vote on the use of extraordinary emergency powers.’” And for that stand, she was kicked out of the Conservative caucus. In fact, we had today two former Conservative members speaking against the undemocratic actions of this government, including this motion, which is enabled by Bill 195.

I will conclude by saying, every generation has to fight for the democracy that we inherit. It is not just something that we inherit and we keep; it’s something that we need to continue fighting for. It’s one thing that should unite all of the members of this House. We should leave the democratic processes of this Legislature stronger than when we inherited them. But over the last three years, there has been a steady erosion, and we need to reverse that erosion.

Report continues in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Peter Sibenik, William Wong
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Arthur, Ian (NDP)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Baber, Roman (IND)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
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Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins	
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
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Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
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