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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 1 November 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 1^{er} novembre 2022

The House met at 0500.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

KEEPING STUDENTS IN CLASS
ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 VISANT À GARDER
LES ÉLÈVES EN CLASSE

Mr. Lecce moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 28, An Act to resolve labour disputes involving school board employees represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees / Projet de loi 28, Loi visant à résoudre les conflits de travail concernant les employés des conseils scolaires représentés par le Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I look to the Minister of Education to lead off the debate.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I introduce Bill 28, the Keeping Students in Class Act, which would provide stability and certainty in our schools. We are now just 72 hours away from a strike that would impact virtually every student across Ontario. For more than two months, we've been negotiating with education unions with a very fair deal—one that maintains a generous pension package and benefits. We came to the table looking to make a deal, with a significant increase of up to 10% over four years, because we know we have to keep kids in class.

Right now our students need the stability of uninterrupted classroom learning. We cannot afford to put our young people through another roller-coaster of school closures and learning disruption. Right now our students need stability.

For two years, our young people have carried the weight of this pandemic as their lives were put on hold. COVID interrupted all of our lives. It was a once-in-a-lifetime public health crisis that touched every aspect of our daily routine. People had to adjust to a new way of living during the pandemic, and that had real impacts, Speaker, on mental and physical health, and the financial well-being of our people.

But even before the pandemic, students, families and parents were faced with uncertainty in the education sector. Just before our students would have to carry the burden of the global pandemic, education unions forced students out of classrooms. For 68 days in 2019-20,

education strikes meant parents had to find child care or take time off work, students missed valuable time in the classroom, and education unions were once again walking out on parents and students as they fought for higher pay and benefits. That uncertainty for students and parents and taxpayers must come to an end. Families have worried for too long about the financial instability that school closures bring with them. For some that means being forced to take time off work, to lose out on income so they can take care of their kids. Others are forced to spend hard-earned income on child care that they wouldn't have otherwise needed—an added cost at a time of rising inflation, when many are already facing affordability challenges.

Everyone in this Legislature must agree that our students belong in the classroom—they're finally getting back to some stability. And I've heard from those students. They want to be in class. They're excited to be back with their friends, Speaker, to prepare themselves for the next steps in life. It's something I've heard over and over again in all regions of the province—regardless of how old our students are, or what grade they're in, they just want to be back in school. They're finally getting their lives back, as I noted, with a routine. They want to once again gain the experiences and the skills and the knowledge that move them forward within our schools.

As Ontario's Minister of Education, I have the opportunity to meet so many young people in this province—our young people moving through the education system—and I've heard their concerns and I've heard their voices, too. It's a privilege to hear from them. And they're passionate about their education. But it's clear what instability means for them. For parents, it means another interruption in their children's education, and those interruptions can be costly. It's not just about academics, Speaker—which we know have been seriously impacted here and around the western world because of education interruptions from the pandemic and the strikes that preceded it—but there are other consequences as well.

Mental health has become a challenge for many young people throughout this pandemic. We know that social isolation led to higher rates of substance abuse, higher rates of domestic violence, higher rates of suicide, and this trend of increasing mental health challenges is reflected in our student population as well. According to CAMH, the pandemic had a major impact on the mental health of Ontario's students: 59% of them said it made them feel depressed about their future; 39% said it made their mental health worse; and 18% reported they seriously contemplated suicide in the past year. The only word to describe these statistics is heartbreaking. And these are not

just numbers on a page to be recorded in Hansard this morning—each and every one reflects a student right here in Ontario, whose life is worse off than it was before the pandemic, and it is for them, Speaker, that we have a moral obligation to stand up and keep children in class.

I remember hearing, just a short while ago, from a student who was really struggling with isolation and online learning, whose story reflects the challenges that so many students and their families were forced to confront over two years of extraordinary circumstances, because we know that learning at home had its difficulties. It was much harder for these kids to follow along in a subject like math than it was already in the classroom. I'm going to quote a parent who talked to me about the challenges their child had: "He began to doubt himself. He felt like he was a failure. He no longer had a social circle to help him. He was alone and he was struggling."

Thankfully, the student is happy to be back in class today. Speaker, you could look in the eyes of this student and see the energy and the passion to be back with his friends in front of his teachers, learning the skills he deserves to. It matters to provide, yes, a critical education, as I noted, but also, I think, importantly, the social supports—the friendship and the return to normal these kids so desperately need.

0510

As I said, this is a story from one student, but it sounds similar to many families in this province who have witnessed first-hand the serious mental and social impacts of learning disruption. Those mental health challenges are only magnified when access to physical health is limited. After-school practice, gym class, phys ed and outdoor activities are all ways our young people burn off excess steam and help them get the exercise they need. And there's not a great replacement for them when they aren't in school. So, on top of learning loss, students are faced with isolation and a more sedentary lifestyle.

These are the students we must keep at the top of our minds as we talk about keeping our schools open, as we fight to ensure stability within our school system. These are the students whose first-hand experiences tells us that a computer screen isn't a substitute for a classroom, that these kids need to be in front of a teacher. We know this, Speaker, which is why we stood so strongly in the defence of a normal and full return to class, something that we know is critical to the life of a child.

Kids have learned through this process, Speaker. And we have learned, as a government, that we have to ensure that these kids have a stable environment around them. We cannot forget or downplay the fact that our young people are profoundly impacted when schools are closed. Young people are profoundly impacted by a school closure; it should not be a routine act in this province, as it has become for the last 40 years in Ontario. However, in most cases everyone here in this place, and all of those who have received a government paycheque, were insulated from this pandemic. We had stable jobs and we knew our paycheques would be deposited. In many cases, we had stable child care options or the means to secure them. To

put it simply: People in this building need to better understand—and I speak to the members opposite—that a strike doesn't impact us all in the same way. We have to remember the impacts it has on the children of this province.

But something else that is clear is that students of all backgrounds and all incomes experience academic decline when their education is interrupted. And all students struggle with the isolation caused by school closures. This was captured by a parent interviewed by McMaster University between March and June of this year, when she said that her "four-year-old son [is] really struggling with isolation. [He has] zero contact with any other people his age." She speaks of how he has "online contact with grandparents but his mental health and social skills are much worse than they were prior to COVID. We're starting to see physical impacts as well." And now Ontario's education unions want to add further uncertainty to this parent's life and further disrupt this mother's son.

Today, members opposite really have a binary choice before them: Will you join the government and stand with parents for stability? Will you stand with parents who have seen the consequences of learning disruption first-hand? Or do you stand with those who once again, just two months after class has returned to normal, seek to throw our entire education system into uncertainty?

Leadership is about doing what is right, not easy. It is about decoupling the outrage on Twitter from the real stories, experiences and often challenges that come with disruption. In short, Speaker, it's about singularly advancing the best interest of children, and that is what any responsible government should do.

Do not, however, underestimate the power of students in this debate, and do not be mistaken into thinking this government does not understand the contributions our workers make within our schools. Circumstances forced them to adapt, and they did so, doing their very best over the pandemic. But those educators in the front of our class also know in their hearts that these kids need to be in class.

More than anyone else, except for parents, they understand our students are facing a real crisis right now. They understand how two years have been interrupted, and quite simply that means lost time—time that our students cannot afford to lose today.

We know this was not the case across the country, and many other jurisdictions pursued temporary layoffs for support staff. In this province, Speaker, under our government, staff remained employed, with steady paycheques, job security and benefits for their families. And we know they were, and are, an integral part of the reopening of our classrooms, part of our commitment to a normal, stable return this September. They are keeping our schools safe today, and for that we are grateful. Because, in short, it is about singularly advancing the best interests of these kids, and we express a great level of gratitude to the workers who support them.

To recognize the hard and dedicated work across our education system, Ontario's government came forward with a desire to increase compensation while protecting

generous benefits and the most valuable pensions in the country. Our intention was to give the largest increase to those who make the least—topping out at 10.3% over four years. That is a level which far outpaces most private sector wage increases. However, union bosses refused to back away from their demand for a nearly 50% increase in compensation. In fact, this all but guaranteed a strike, sending students home after being back in class for just two months. This is unacceptable. It is unacceptable to parents that they have to go through this again. It's unacceptable to these kids that they have to be out of class on Friday.

The Keeping Students in Class Act would, if passed, establish a reasonable and a fair four-year collective agreement with CUPE education workers across the province. The bill would enable this government to live up to the promise we made parents: that kids would be in class, without interruption, from September until June, where they belong.

The proposed legislation would establish a central collective agreement that increases compensation for Ontario's CUPE education workers, offering a salary increase of 2.5%—increased from an initial offer of 2%—for employees at the top end of their salary grids being around \$43,000 annually. That was increased as well, from \$40,000. And we're increasing the salaries for those who make above that threshold to 1.5% every year for the life of that contract.

Mr. Speaker, to recognize the importance they play, we're also increasing benefits contributions, resulting in a \$6,100 annual employer contribution for every employee by August 31, 2026.

We are also going to be supporting the funding of the Support for Students Fund, which will establish and help create 875 teachers and 1,600 to 1,830 education workers—more workers in our schools to make a difference for our kids.

Speaker, when you reflect on where we started in 2017-18, there are roughly 7,000 more education workers, specifically, in our schools, because our government has been increasing investments to support more staffing, more EAs and custodians, on the front line of our classrooms.

We're also modifying the sick leave and short-term disability plan provisions that protect stability of student learning, while maintaining generous pension, benefits and sick leave programs for those workers. We're providing funding for apprenticeship training of \$4.5 million and extending a modified job security provision.

In addition, local collective agreements negotiated and settled with CUPE in 2019 would be extended for four years. All of this is on top of the most generous taxpayer contribution to the education worker pension plan in Canada that we provide. What this means is that Ontario's government is committed to ensuring our education system is the most generous one in the country.

But this bill also demonstrates our absolute commitment to ensuring students remain in class. Because that is our number one priority as a government. Kids need to be

in class to get back on track. For Ontario's Plan to Catch Up, schools need to be open.

And, to make sure that schools have the tools and resources they need to stay open safely in our post-pandemic world, we have made massive investments in air filtration and ventilation improvements. We have invested more than \$600 million to make sure that every single school has improved air ventilation—over 100,000 stand-alone HEPA units within our learning spaces.

We continue to be among a minority of provinces that provide rapid antigen tests to symptomatic staff and students. We've also provided more resources and training to ensure our staff have the tools they need to create safe environments. In fact, we've spent \$3.2 billion to give our schools the tools they need to provide safe learning environments for our kids. That includes up to 3,000 staff who were hired through our COVID support fund.

0520

So we've got a plan to make sure that our education workers receive more compensation and that our schools are equipped with the tools to stay safe. But we know our students need tools and support right now as well. That's why Ontario's government is also spending a record amount on getting our students back on track with the Plan to Catch Up. It truly is an historic investment of more than \$600 million. We're going to get students back on track in this province. The money will be used, and is being used, to support learning recovery, provide tutoring supports and facilitate summer learning, all while increasing supports for mental health and special education.

We announced Ontario's Plan to Catch Up last summer, and it builds on Ontario's Learning Recovery Action Plan, which we had previously introduced in February of this year—we're continuously investing in our schools and investing in our students to help them through this difficulty—that's our five-point plan to strengthen learning recovery. It includes \$176 million for our historic tutoring support program, and there has been flexibility built in with the tutoring supports being delivered through our school boards and partners directly to students in small groups—after school, during school, on weekends, over the summer and online, too. Mr. Speaker, the province-wide program began in April, and I was happy to announce just two weeks ago that we'll be extending it into the new year.

We are ensuring there is an effective implementation of tutoring supports in every school board in the province. This is the first and the only tutoring program of its kind in our country. I speak about this because I know how important it is that kids learn the skills they have lost, a learning loss that we have seen in this province and around the world.

To build on this tutoring program, we've acted to support parents right now, when they need the help the most. Ontario's government has spent \$365 million for direct payments to parents to address the needs of students who are returning to normal classrooms, because we recognize parents play a critical role in the life of their child. This means that parents and guardians will have the

choice to use this funding to secure additional supports to help their kids and to make sure they have everything they need to get back on track in this province.

In response to this—well, we've heard it before: Opposition members, unions and others in the education system have attacked this support for Ontario parents with the same old tired lines. They say parents don't know how to best use this money; they would have used it better for them. Mr. Speaker, this government knows better, because this government trusts our parents, who every day work for their kids and work for themselves.

Be assured that Ontario's education system is being funded at the highest levels ever recorded in the province's history. On a budget line, that means almost \$35 billion for our education system this year alone. That historic funding commitment from Ontario's government is having a real impact on our education system. That's a \$90-million increase of investment for mental health, 420% higher than when we started in 2017 under the former Liberal government. We've increased the Special Education Grant by \$92 million, totalling \$3.25 billion this year. This means an increase of more than 3,200 educational assistants helping our students with special needs—real investments from taxpayers getting real results for our students.

In February of this year, Ontario's government released the Grants for Student Needs, the primary funding vehicle for our school boards—\$26.12 billion—again, the highest level of investment in education in our province's history. It's an increase of \$383.9 million when compared to last year alone. Per-student funding increases the consumer price index, meaning that it is a real net investment. Growth in the Grants for Student Needs since 2002 and 2003 reflects a 77% increase, compared to an increase of 43% in CPI.

Ontario's historic investment in education also includes nearly \$550 million in funding with respect to the Support for Students Fund and the COVID-19 Learning Recovery Fund. Both of these funds are supporting the hiring of staff within our schools. That fund has been extended and increased in this legislation, as proposed, to ensure consistency over time. Together, this means that under our government we will fund up to 5,675 more staff in our schools, supporting our kids in every region of this province. That reflects an addition of up to 900 more teachers, between 1,600 and 1,800 new education workers as part of this proposal, supporting special education and mental health and well-being, language instruction, Indigenous education and STEM programming, which we know is so critical to our kids.

Additionally, this means up to 3,000 more staff like early childhood educators, educational assistants and education workers. That builds on our record of success on this front, because between 2017-18 and 2022-23 alone, between that period since we took office, we've added more than 8,000 staff to our education system. During our government's tenure, that's 932 more teachers, bringing our total to 132,000 in the province. We've added nearly 7,000 more education workers, bringing the total to

more than 90,000, and we've added more than 200 principals and vice-principals—that's 8,000 more staff—while student enrolment is virtually flat over this period of time. That is a real commitment to our students and our next generation. We're giving our students the supports that they need, and that's proved in the numbers that are black and white before you. We know, most especially, in addition to those supports, the key principle of our plan is providing stability and keeping kids in school.

The record of funding and investment in education staff means that Ontario has the lowest average pupil-to-adult ratio in kindergarten classes in the country, the lowest class size caps for grades 1 to 3, and among the lowest regulated averages for grades 4 to 12 when compared to other provinces and territories that have regulated averages.

We're supporting our students with our Plan to Catch Up, historic investments in public education, free tutoring and more staff. We're supporting parents with direct financial supports they can invest in their kids' success, and we're supporting our education system with record funding that has employed more teachers than ever before in this province. With these historic investments from Ontario taxpayers, we know that our education system has the tools it needs to stay open and to help our kids catch up, and that's more important now than ever, after the significant interruption of in-class learning caused by the pandemic. It's clear that students have been among the most impacted by this once-in-a-lifetime public health crisis.

One parent reflects on the impact of a purely online experience. She said, "I'm worried about the impact ... on my child's physical and mental" health "as well as their future education." She's concerned about the impacts of the shutdowns and the impacts on her daughters and their relationship with each other. That's not a unique story. This is a typical concern that parents today have, because they say first-hand, themselves, in their homes, the ongoing at-home-learning challenges that they faced. These parents understood quite clearly that we cannot afford more disruption and uncertainty in the classrooms of this province.

This concern is echoed by a mother in Windsor-Essex, who said plainly, "Our children need to go back to school. My daughter genuinely wants to be with her friends in school." Parents get it. They get that school is a foundational part of the development of a young mind. Academic performance, social development, athletic activity and lifelong success are what our education system is designed to produce. This parent understands we cannot afford more disruption and uncertainty in our classrooms.

The sad reality is that we're starting to see the clear data on the academic consequences of this disruption. EQAO results paint a picture many parents already plainly saw themselves. Ontario students are no exception to the global trend of learning loss and academic decline. Everywhere, from the UK to New York, from Charlottetown to Victoria, student performance is trending downward, and we believe, as a government, that is not an acceptable

reality. English EQAO results have seen a decline. There's a decline in math in all regions of the province and country. French language, English language, reading, writing and math: In all these areas, we see decline. This is a trend we're seeing in the entire world faced by disruption. I want to talk about that, because perhaps now more than ever, this is illustrative of the difference that in-class instruction can make.

We know, Speaker, as I mentioned on the EQAO data, math is a critical subject for success in the modern economy. In everything from the trades to business, it is something where hands-on instruction is clearly needed. Working out problems and asking questions are infinitely harder when you're not in a classroom, and we know that playing catch-up is harder than getting it right the first time. That's why all of our tutoring support and very basis of Ontario's Plan to Catch Up are designed to increase competency in the basics: literacy and math.

0530

Math was in our sights even before the global pandemic's impact. We are already moving to ensure our education system prepares students for success in our modern, globalized economy. That includes our work to destream the grade 9 program, which prevents students from unfairly being excluded from success in STEM by pushing them into applied fields way too early. We've also moved to bring back-to-the-basics mathematics, shifting away from the unproven educational "discovery learning" introduced by the former government, and relying on proven education curricula.

We can also see the impacts of COVID on learning loss, and we know that an updated curriculum won't help on that on its own because they need to be in the classroom in order to receive the benefits of a modern curriculum in the first place. And this government is making sure that's exactly where they will be, uninterrupted, from September right until June.

Ontario's Plan to Catch Up will help make sure that our kids can achieve the academic success they need to set themselves on a path to a brighter future. But it was not just academic success that was impacted two years ago by interruption to in-class learning. Our students were confronted with significant emotional and social impacts as well. This was summed up effectively by a newcomer—a parent who only wants the best for their child. This parent said:

"We immigrated to Canada as a family a few months before COVID-19" closed down our schools. "The last two years have been challenging in many more ways than we expected. Our daughter was supposed to be in grade 9 and our son was supposed to start grade 5.

"Both of our kids were excited to start school in Canada and make friends at school. Instead, they felt very isolated and without any social network, which impacted their mental health and overall confidence.... Both my wife and I must work to make ends meet so schools being closed further enhanced our struggles.

"Our daughter is now in grade 12 and is very excited to be in school and finally have the chance to make friends.

She can socialize and learn from her peers. It's actually helping her feel like she belongs and that she can have a future in Canada.

"To be honest, I've never seen my kids this excited to go back to school. As parents, we are earnestly asking to keep schools open. This is the only year our daughter can experience a normal school year here in Canada and she would be heartbroken if she had to go back to online learning. We also think it will affect her ability to succeed in university if she is forced to go back.... Please keep schools open."

This is a parent who understands the importance of in-person learning, the challenges of disruption to their kids, the unfairness that this imposes on them on a cyclical basis in this province. As so many newcomers know, schools are a place for their kids to grow their social circles, to be safe, and in doing so, help connect their families with new people, neighbours and friends in their community. It's an integral part of their lives, as they adapt to and learn about the life of this country.

This is another parent who understands we cannot afford more uncertainty and disruption in our classrooms. It's not just newcomers who understand the profound impacts our education system has on the development of our kids as they take these steps forward. It's an integral part of the physical health and well-being of our young people too. This mother from London correctly notes:

"Kids aren't exercising, they're not interacting with their peers or even just other people. Those types of behaviours which we know are kind of maladaptive for healthy child development and learning. As a mother of two school-aged children, I think I speak for most families in saying for the good of everyone's mental health, our children belong in school."

And this is absolutely true, Speaker. This parent, another one, who understands we cannot afford more uncertainty within our schools, that we cannot afford disruptions to in-class learning—really, this hits the point of the discussion today. Schools are integral to the development of young people. Their social skills, making friends and learning teamwork: All of these foundational skills are developed and enhanced in a school setting. And to take that away, especially after the past two years, is simply unconscionable.

I'd ask those across the aisle to tell me a number of how many more days of learning disruption are you okay with. How many more hours should we sacrifice? Do you agree with the recent CUPE leader who said they admired the 16-day strike in New Brunswick during a recent online town hall? Does the opposition agree that our kids can afford to lose more than two weeks of learning after what they've been through in the last two years? Here on this side, this government is clear: We won't put up with another hour of learning disruption caused by uncertainty.

But even more than social skills and development, schools are an added layer of social support for those students and their families. Sometimes some of us forget that students rely on schools for a number of critical support functions. I think we all know that schools across

the province are places where many students get a meal they would not otherwise have at home, so when students are forced out of class it really is, for them, taking food off the table. It's removing services that they need to live a healthy life. These are real consequences that should not be abstractions to members opposite. These are consequences felt by those who are the most vulnerable in our society. We must acknowledge these consequences because we cannot paint a picture where students aren't deeply impacted when they no longer have access to a classroom.

Another very real consequence, when in-class learning is disrupted, is felt by the parents at home who rely on our education system for child care. Ontario's government has signed a historic deal with the federal government to expand child care spaces and affordability across this province, and a key provider of child care, as you know, Speaker, are modern schools where their buildings include publicly funded child care spaces for our kids. So our schools are a critical part of child care for many families across the province.

One mother with a special-needs daughter captured this when she said, "I am a single mother with a special-needs daughter. It's up to me to pay all the bills and provide all the emotional and physical supports" for my daughter. "I now have a new understanding of how hard life can get...."

"With nobody else to care for her, I have had to take several extended leaves of absence from work. With just my income, I couldn't afford to send her to daycare either. I can't begin to express the difficulties both my daughter and I faced the last two years. I know parents with special-needs children understand what I'm talking about...."

Mr. Speaker, this is a parent who understands the consequences of learning disruption, and I hope her words are heard by members opposite, because there are real costs—they are real costs to the most vulnerable kids within our schools. When we take away critical supports like this, like school, from these kids—it means the world to them. This is a parent who understands that our schools are critical and we cannot afford uncertainty or disruption to them.

Every MPP across the province has heard stories like the one I've just recounted today. They've heard the anxiety from parents and the challenges our students have faced. The MPPs here today should listen to these stories. If they did, they would know how much everyone involved with the education system, from parents to students to education workers, want to have their kids in class, uninterrupted, from September right until June.

A father from Hawkesbury was clear when he said, "Speaking on behalf of my family and the families I know, when the kids are home, you're spending all day with them. As a parent, you have to help them with ... school.... The burden is heavy for parents, but, more importantly, our children are ready to go back...." They want to stay in school.

Kids in class without interruption: That's the message we're hearing over and over again in this province. We all know the burden faced by families when their kids aren't

in school. It is something no one wants to see. This is true for parents like the one I just mentioned, a father who understands that his kids need to be in class, because we cannot afford more uncertainty for them.

This is also true for other education workers, and we can't forget that. Just the other day, I was speaking to the partner of a grade 3 teacher who told me, "It was so hard for [my wife] to be away from her students. Now that the pandemic is ending, she told me how excited she is to be back in the classroom. It is important to her to be there for her kids. She loves it."

This is not a scenario where it's us against them. Our teachers and our education workers want to be in classrooms. They love very much these kids, and we are grateful for the service they make to our schools. It's why we're investing historic amounts in them—to support them, to hire more of them, to increase the funding within our schools—of almost \$35 billion across the education system. That's why we're meeting students where they're at with a one-of-a-kind, publicly funded tutoring program that focuses on reading, on writing and math. It's why we've created Ontario's Plan to Catch Up.

0540

But, Speaker, none of this matters if kids are not in school on Friday. None of this matters—all of the staff, all of the funding, all of the people—if kids are disrupted again in this province by an education union. A new mother from Kingsville shared with me, who has another child currently in the education system—she implores us to keep kids in class where she said: "I am on mat leave, so I am able to stay home but it is really hard to care for a newborn and still assist with" my child. "Everyone in my house" needs this support, "and I am desperately hoping there won't be any more interruptions." This is a parent who is begging us to keep schools open because she, like many parents, cannot afford more disruptions and uncertainty in their lives.

So if students, parents, teachers and education workers all want to be in class without disruption, what is the obstacle? Why are we here? In short, it's because of the intransigence, the insistence of a union for a strike, the lack of compassion they have for the impacts on our families.

Parents know that union strikes, unfortunately, are nothing new in this province. In just the past 33 years, since 1989, parents and families have had to endure over 2,200 days of union strikes—2,200 days of strikes over the past decades. That means, in just over three decades, families have had to endure more than six full years of strikes when you aggregate all of the local and provincial strikes in the province. Put more simply, for every five and half years, there has been one year of strikes.

Is this sustainable? Do we think this is acceptable? Do we think this is unique to the Progressive Conservative governments of this day, or a commonality that unites every Premier of every party across the province throughout a generation? It is unacceptable, and someone must speak up for parents to say, "Enough."

On top of that already staggering number, nearly half a year—137 full days—were actually from illegal strike

action. And these numbers become even more stark when you understand that a school year is September to June, encompassing 194 days, not a full 365. So just looking at a school year, 2,244 days of strikes equal nearly 11.6 full years of in-class learning disrupted.

That is as stark as it is informative. It is a pattern we have seen from education unions with governments of all stripes: New Democrat, Liberal and PC. Mike Harris, Bob Rae and Dalton McGuinty all faced strikes from education workers. Not much unites them except the unions of the day escalated against the people of the day, parents and the kids in the classroom that depended on being in school. And this pattern raises an important question: At what point must government act to protect the public interest when it is out of line with those special interests? At what point does a government say, “Enough”—that these kids have been through enough?

I think most parents believe in their heart that these kids need to be in school. We have all heard these stories, moving stories of angst of parents, since specifically Sunday, when CUPE decided to announce a five-day strike notice to proceed with a province-wide strike impacting two million kids, closing school boards across the province. That is not a position parents should be in in this province.

Again, because we’ve just established positive routines in our schools, children have been in school for two months—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: They have been in school for two months, establishing a positive routine, and I think that is very positive for the kids. It’s amazing to see these children—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Windsor West will come to order. The member for Brampton North will come to order.

The Minister of Education has the floor.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, why I speak about that history is because it speaks to the omnipresence, the common challenge of strikes on kids throughout the ages. This is not new. Anyone who has a child in this House would have been affected by strikes under governments past.

I guess the question fundamentally is, do we think that’s acceptable, that every few years in this province, kids are disrupted? I think most reasonable people in this House, but certainly at home, recognize that is an unacceptable proposition for millions of children. We are entrusted with their welfare and best interests. We can’t sit idle. We can’t be a bystander. We have to stand up and take action in defence of public education, which is exactly what the government is doing.

When we listen to the challenges, they’re not very different from past Premiers, and we know the saying is as true today as it was 30 years ago. Kids just went through difficulty and they want to be in school. But unlike the past, unlike the last 30 years, the last two have been

unprecedented in human history. We have never seen these impacts on kids. We have never seen the learning loss and mental health adversity. Kids went through such difficulty, with learning regression and mental health difficulty at a national high.

Today Ontario’s government answered the question with absolute clarity: We believe our kids belong in class, and that’s exactly where they will be.

We’re at this point because, after two years of learning disruption in education, unions are at it again. Families across the province are faced with a very real threat that would once again close schools just as life is getting back to normal. It is sad that we’re here in the first place, because we believe the best option is a voluntary agreed-upon option, by all parties. But the union decided on Sunday that they will strike on Friday, not withdrawing their commitment to a strike—imposing hardship, again, on children, on parents and on all communities in the province of Ontario. They signalled they were moving towards a strike even before bargaining had practically begun.

Let’s just remember the context of where we started with CUPE. They introduced the strike notion at the beginning of bargaining. They then opted to move quickly to seek—

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order: the member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It has come to our attention that today’s proceedings are not being broadcast online. That excludes the ability of many people in this province to watch the proceedings for today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It just came to my attention seconds ago as well. We’re checking it out. It’s my understanding the proceedings are being broadcast on our television channel. It may be that we’re not online, but we’re checking into it. There’s nothing out of order.

Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: CUPE introduced the notion of a strike at the beginning of bargaining and then opted to move quickly, alone—the only education union to do so—to seek a strike mandate. This is before the government even tabled our first offer to the union—the discussion of a strike. They were on this path all along, unless we met a nearly 50% increase in compensation. We shouldn’t be here, and I’ve said it is with deep regret that we are. CUPE had a choice. We presented them an offer yesterday to accept a better deal with a commitment they withdraw their strike Friday, but they said no.

Today we know, with this backdrop of the government increasing spending and hiring more staff and introducing new learning tools to get kids caught up, the thought of a disruption is unpalatable and unacceptable to Ontario parents. There is no appetite for this strike.

I want to remind folks here once again that the budget of public education is at the highest level ever recorded in our history. While daily enrolment has remained essentially flat since 2002-03, we’ve added more than 46,000 education workers—that’s 10,000 designated early

childhood educators, 19,000 more education workers, 17,000 more teachers and 440 principals and vice-principals in the province. As a result, Ontario has some of the smallest class sizes in the country, because we know how important education is. It's why we're making sure our system has the tools and supports in place.

0550

To make sure that our kids have the modern classrooms they need, we made a historic investment of \$14 billion over the next 10 years to build new schools and upgrade existing ones. Thanks to the leadership of our Premier, the Minister of Infrastructure and our colleagues across government, we're getting done what the Liberals couldn't. We're building, not closing, schools and creating better futures for students across Ontario. What that looks like is almost half a billion dollars allocated for this year alone to build schools in Ontario.

We are building on a track record of success in this respect, because since 2018 Ontario's government has approved nearly 200 school construction projects and the development of more than 300 child care and education building projects and more than 100 major projects and schools are being built as we speak. This is going to make a profound difference in the life of a child—and that's on top of 88 additions and renovations to existing facilities. As we move forward towards making sure every parent and family in Ontario has a child care space, that includes part of 6,458 new spaces approved since 2019.

Speaker, I say this to provide relevant context of where we are at—a government that has increased investments in public education to the highest levels ever recorded in Ontario history; a government that has increased funding per student in every school board; hired more staff—7,000 education workers alone hired under this Progressive Conservative government; a government that has increased funding to parents of nearly \$2 billion in direct financial support; and a government that has offered our education workers higher pay, the maintenance of the best benefits and pensions and sick leave, because we value them and we also recognize that they play a critical role in our schools.

What's become clear more than ever in our education system is that our education workers and our teachers now have the resources they need to keep kids in the classroom. But the barrier to this today is a union on a path to a strike, intransigent in their commitment to a nearly 50% increase in pay and benefits. That's what today is about. It's why we are here, because a union on Sunday—an education union this past Sunday, Speaker—announced in this province that they will strike on Friday, and this government is taking action to ensure kids remain in school on Friday and every day this year.

If you listen to the members opposite, would they have just permitted the strike? Would they have sat idle over the past three decades—because there were strikes under the NDP of course in the early 1990s, you will recall, for those of us in publicly funded schools. It happens too often in Ontario, and I think parents and students deserve better.

It's now more clear than ever that we have to stand up for our kids. That's what today is about. It's about keeping

students in school and putting an end to more than six years of strikes over the past three decades. Families must be able to depend on and trust our education system to provide our next generation with the tools they need to succeed.

Today our government is making sure that our kids will be in class uninterrupted until June, getting the education they deserve. The Legislature is in a unique position to offer parents absolute certainty that all of us are united in one purpose: to get our kids back on track after two extraordinary years, and that starts with ensuring students remain in class this Friday.

With education funded at its highest levels in our history, with new and expanded tutoring supports and with Ontario's Plan to Catch Up, our kids, our educators and our schools can recover from the learning loss experienced globally from these past two years of the pandemic. And it starts, Speaker, as the most basic principle of this plan: The philosophy that underpins this strategy is keeping kids in class.

We owe it to our students to make sure they do not take an even bigger bite out of their educational journey. We owe it to them to put an end to a pattern of education strikes that has taken literally years away from our children. And we owe it to them, Mr. Speaker, to pass this bill to make sure our children and our students have the opportunities to become the leaders we know they can be.

Mr. Speaker, when I spoke to parents of the province of Ontario over the past months, they've all been clear. In one parent's words last night on Halloween, "Our kids have been through hell. They deserve to be in school. Everyone knows this." That message resonated with me, because I think we've all seen the impacts on children, either your own kids, nieces and nephews—those around us that we love.

That is an unacceptable proposition for any responsible government, especially when knowing we are increasing our wages for workers every single year over the course of this program, increasing benefits every single year over the course of this program, maintaining perhaps the best education pension plan in the federation and 131 days of sick leave. That is a competitive offer because we pay them—we're going to hear from members opposite perhaps a different story—\$27, on average, an hour. They make more in Ontario than any province east and west of us.

We've increased pay every year in the program we're offering today in this legislation, and should it pass, we will reaffirm our commitment to them by providing job security, sick leave, pensions, benefits and increasing pay for themselves and their families. We're hiring more of them—1,800 more, specifically—as part of this contract with education workers and roughly another net new 800 teachers, supported by our government's funding. This will make a difference in our schools. But as I said, Speaker, we didn't want to be here in the first place.

We signed voluntary deals with every education union in the province of Ontario just two or three years ago. We got a deal with every education union just a few years ago.

And it's sad that we're here, because we gave the union an offering to avert this needless strike. They showed up on Sunday and they made clear their commitment that they will not withdraw or rescind their commitment to a strike. That's unfair. That is unfair to students and to parents, and I believe it's incumbent on the government to stand up for the rights of children to be in class. Yes, because we do believe kids have a right to be in school. We believe that shouldn't be upended every couple of years in Ontario. Locally, provincially, it's just a problem, and it creates a great deal of challenge for the people we represent.

And so when we understand the context of why we are here—the funding increases in our schools, the stories of parents with very real struggles in Ontario—when we hear of these concerns observed in our province, the question we must ask ourselves is, what will we do if the union will strike?

I suppose the members opposite may say, “Well, accept the offer of the union. Accept the nearly 50% increase in compensation and all will go away.” Right? That's not an option of any responsible government. It's why they sit there and the government is entrusted here to make the difficult decisions of what is affordable, sustainable and fair for the workers in our schools and in the province of Ontario.

It's why we brought forth a deal that we believe provides stability. But the first principle in this negotiation must be the acceptance that we've got to be in school, that parents shouldn't have to be further burdened by a strike, a needless strike, at a time when children have faced unprecedented difficulties in their lives.

What is the moral imperative that guides us as legislators if not to stand up for the interests of children who, again, are facing another strike in a matter of days? We have an obligation to our children, to the next generation, to the parents who pay the bills, to ensure their kids remain in school. This is a bill rooted in common sense and learned experience because the entire western world has watched as education took a massive hit from the pandemic and the strikes that preceded it uniquely in this province.

We've seen the impact it's had on our kids. After these kids have established routines, have benefited immensely from being in school with clubs and sports, I believe we have to uphold that obligation to them, to the next generation, to ensure that their right to learn is protected, it is supported, it is championed in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we have been clear on our commitment since day one. We will stand to ensure children remain in class. We will advance the principle that children must be in school. I didn't expect that to be controversial this morning. I thought we all would agree with the premise. But what we're going to hear from the opposition is perhaps not a clear position on do they support the strike or not. And I'd like to know, do you support the strike on Friday or not? Will you agree and stand in solidarity with the workers on Friday on the picket lines or will you be with parents, will you stand with parents—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The official opposition needs to come to order. We'll have lots of opportunity to debate this bill. Right now, the Minister of Education has the floor.

Minister of Education.

0600

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Or will you stand with students and with parents? Will you stand with them all and simply say to the union—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader will come to order. The member for Waterloo will come to order.

I apologize to the Minister of Education for the interruption.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Will they say to the union, in good faith, “Please withdraw the strike that is proceeding on Friday”? The member opposite—I think I heard someone say, “What strike?” as if they're not aware of the news that TDSB, just last night, confirmed they're closing schools because of the strike announced by CUPE. That is not fair.

Many of these members from the urban centre of Toronto should be the first to be appalled that kids on Friday—and next week, potentially—will be out of class. But they're not. There's silence and complacency here in the opposition, where they should be saying to the union, constructively: “Focus on getting a deal. Oppose the striking impacting children”—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Opposition, come to order. The member for Waterloo, come to order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I do hope, in my heart, that we can proceed with children being in school without disruption, that we can provide some stability for these kids who have been through so much difficulty, that we can ensure, as a Parliament, that these kids don't have to worry anymore about a disruption to their life. They have paid the price. They have been burdened so significantly and challenged so immensely. And so, I hope that the union will hear our message. There was another way.

While we're always open to hearing options—if the private mediator calls the government back, we always stand ready to listen. We stand ready to negotiate. What we will not accept, what we will not tolerate, is a strike impacting two million kids in this province. We will not apologize in the defence of keeping kids in class. That is so important to parents. It's important to this government and to our Premier.

Today, I'm asking for all of your support for this bill that ensures kids remain in class, and I hope we can work together to ensure we get them back on the right track, in class, learning the skills they need to succeed today and tomorrow and for future generations. By doing so, we will help a generation of students unleash their full potential, give them the tools and the confidence to achieve in Ontario, to graduate, to get a good job, to own a home, to aspire to be the Canadians we want among them. But in order for them to achieve their best, to deliver upon all the

aspirations we have for your children and the next generation, they have to be in school. That's why I implore this House to pass this bill today. Thank you so much.

Interjections.

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

Questions to the Minister of Education?

MPP Jamie West: I listened very intently to the Minister of Education go on and on about—let me just shorten it: The last couple of days, starting in August, I have explained to the Premier and the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Education that these workers are paid so low that they feed their children by going to food banks. I would like to know—from the Premier, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Labour—why they're content with an offer that is going to continue to force workers to go to food banks to feed their children.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we have made clear that in this offer will be an increase in pay, every single year over the course of the four-year program—2.5% every year, in addition to maintaining pensions and benefits, which most people in this economy do not have.

I'm not sure which benchmark the members opposite are comparing us to. Provinces east and west pay their workers less than Ontario—\$27 an hour, on average. That is why we believe the proposal we brought forward—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: —is fair, affordable and, more importantly, provides stability for the kids that we are here to stand up for in this province.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Minister, I know you and I have had many conversations over the years. I think you all know I have five kids in our wonderful public education system here in the province of Ontario. I've seen first-hand what the pandemic has done and how it has set our kids back—but, most importantly, socially. So, Minister, I know you touched on it a little bit in your hour lead, but I'm hoping maybe you can talk a little bit more about how important it is to keep kids in class from a social aspect and help kids catch up with what they've missed over the last couple of years.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Conestoga. Yes, he's been passionate on this issue and very clear about his commitment to keeping kids in school, and we are very grateful for that.

I've heard from a lot of parents, including in Kitchener–Waterloo and that region specifically, about the impacts of social isolation on children. When you speak to the CEOs of the hospitals of CHEO and SickKids, for example—the Children's Health Coalition that represents them all—the data points are entirely staggering. And frankly, it saddens a lot of people to see so many young people facing mental health adversity. We look at eating disorders and anxiety that has proliferated so largely in the province of Ontario. The impacts are real and the stories are known, and now

the obligation on this House is to stand up to make sure that never happens again to these kids in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I heard the minister opposite tie himself in knots trying to explain away why this government needs to legislate workers back to work who have not left work. Classrooms in this province were closed for 27 weeks—the worst record during the pandemic of any province, and pretty much anywhere in the world—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: The members opposite don't like to hear the facts, but that is a fact—

Interjections.

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

The Member for Davenport has the floor to ask her question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, the men opposite don't like it when we talk about facts. But 27 weeks they were closed. Minister, who shut those classrooms down? Was it the education workers or was it you?

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

The Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: If the NDP had their way, they would have been listening to the education unions and closed schools the entire school year. That's the truth. They know that, because we're not beholden to them. We're going to stand up for what is right.

We believe kids should be in school. The members opposite should profess their commitment to oppose a strike that impacts every child in this province. We will do what is right, even if it is difficult, and keep these kids in school.

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

Mrs. Nina Tangri: In June 2022, the people of this province re-elected our government, partly because of the great work this Premier, this minister and this government did to support parents and students across this province. Speaker, can I ask the minister why our government cannot tolerate even one day of learning disruption?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I do appreciate the question. I think what it underscores is the history of this pandemic and the strikes that preceded it, just a few years ago in Ontario. I don't think there's a parent out there that has a tolerance for disruption when they see the impacts of learning loss. We knew this, Speaker—everyone knew this before EQAO released their data, but now they have done so, providing a province-wide picture of a problem. It is not unique in Ontario, but it's consistent with the entire western world.

Learning loss is creating real challenges in literacy and numeracy. We have young kids who just don't know how to read. I've spoken to a speech pathologist who told me that many young children are yet to be able to articulate themselves and basically communicate. They can't write in kindergarten, grade 1 or 2. It's why we brought forth a

plan, a \$25-million early reading intervention program, because we know the challenges are real and it is a necessity to invest, which is exactly what we've done and what we're proposing to do in this bill as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: In the province of Ontario, all collective agreements are settled by 98% without a work stoppage, including the last time the CUPE workers were at the bargaining table. Bill 28, however, becomes the first instance where a seldom-used “notwithstanding” clause is used to suppress constitutionally protected labour rights in this country—the first time in our history. Why are you not at the bargaining table where you should be and not here right now?

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

0610

Minister of Education to respond.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: What is truly unprecedented in this province is that we have an education union in Ontario alone that is confirming they will strike on Friday. We're the only province with education unions committing to strikes after this pandemic. That is unprecedented. It is unprecedented, it is unfair, and it is necessary for this government to stand up for children and their parents to provide the stability every child in Ontario deserves.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Through you, Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask the minister: As a parent, I got a lot of calls from other parents talking about how important it is to them for their children to be in school, but what I want to ask the minister is—this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, has been working for workers. Now, when it comes to this legislation, what is your message to the labour leaders and the union, and what are you saying about the government's commitment to the relationship with the labour leaders and unions?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Mississauga–Malton for the question. We continue to negotiate with all of our education partners in good faith because we want a deal. We want to do what we did two years ago in this province, which was sign a voluntary agreement overwhelmingly ratified by the members of the union, by the trustees' association and the crown.

I want to do that again, Speaker. We don't want to be here. I made that very clear. We shouldn't have had to have brought legislation to this House, if the union only consented to withdraw their five-day strike notice that will affect millions of kids on Friday—our messages will continue to work to get a deal so long as we can commit to keeping kids in school.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Speaker, through you, it is horrendous that the average yearly salary for someone in this bargaining unit is \$39,000, with that bench

over there and that government over there giving themselves a raise of \$16,000.

With inflation entering into double digits, what are you—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. The House will come to order.

Start the clock. The member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you, Speaker. Somebody ate their Wheaties this morning, I guess. Because they can afford it.

I'm asking the minister why it is they're forcing these workers to go to food banks and work double jobs to be able to support food on their own tables.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. First of all, the number figured is worthy of some revision in the House. The average compensation package for an education worker in Ontario is \$49,000. The number cited is \$39,000 because the union used part-time workers to draw down the average. Speaker, let's not treat the people of this province like idiots, okay? They know the facts. They know they have—

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

Further debate?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I will be sharing my time with the member for Sudbury today.

Normally when I rise in the House, I start by saying what an honour it is to speak, but today is the first time that I'm disappointed about rising to speak. I'm deeply disappointed that this government, which consistently put our kids dead last during the pandemic, is now threatening their school year. I'm deeply disappointed that this government, which promised kids a normal, stable school year, is refusing to bargain a fair and reasonable collective agreement which would ensure they experienced no disruptions. I'm deeply disappointed that this government, which shut down schools for more time than any other jurisdiction in North America and consistently refused to invest in the smaller class sizes that would protect them and help them to catch up, is now putting that education further at risk by driving away the caring adults who support our kids every single day.

Every day for the past two and a half years, these workers have been there for our kids, many of them in person, because CUPE education workers fill many roles that still needed to be done in person—cleaning schools, supporting kids with accessibility needs. They have been there for our kids despite the fact that the government was paying them wages so low that one quarter of them have had to reduce the amount of food they use or go to a food bank to get by. And the thanks that this government is giving them is to go nuclear on them and on our kids' school year, trampling on the rights of workers to collectively bargain and legislating a wage rate that will drive even more workers out of education. So much for

supporting our kids. So much for a government that will have workers' backs.

Let's be very clear what we're talking about here, Speaker: CUPE education workers fill very important roles in our schools as education assistants, early childhood educators, custodians, office staff, lunch monitors, IT staff, library workers and bus drivers. They may not be teachers, but our system simply could not function without them.

My kids have been blessed with great teachers, but it's the CUPE staff at their school who really stand out in my mind as special. Madame Pat, the kindergarten ECE, is the one who loved on my kids every single day when they started junior kindergarten, making me and my partner feel okay about our babies being at school. She's the one who helped my oldest daughter through a difficult time when mom was away working in the 2015 election, checking in with Mira every day about how she was feeling about mom's absence. When I thanked Madame Pat later and told her what a support she was to my daughter, she said her heart just soared, because all she wanted was to know that she was making a difference in the lives of her little pupils.

My son, Luc, has been having some health challenges over the past year. And it's the school receptionist, Ms. Amelia, who is the one that checks in with us every time Luc isn't feeling well, sharing his symptoms, discussing strategies to see if we can keep him in class or whether we need to come and pick him up.

I've heard so many stories like this from parents and teachers, Speaker. These workers are so important to students, to parents and to teachers. They meet kids' physical needs. They meet their emotional needs. They meet their accessibility needs.

Kerry Monaghan, an Ottawa resident whose son has autism, said, "He was able to attend his first field trip because she was there to be with him.

"Just like she's with him every second he's at school doing everything a parent would do for their child with additional needs. She is there when I can't be. She is worth everything."

Jason, one of my constituents, has a child with an anxiety disorder that constantly disrupts his learning. Last year, he had an EA in the classroom who helped him to take body breaks when his anxiety got too high. The EA spent countless hours assisting in the implementation of his independent education plan and gave him access to a few thousand dollars' worth of special equipment that would stay locked up if the EA were not there with him. Jason says the EA changed the trajectory of his son's educational experience.

In another case that was shared with me, a child with severe motor disabilities was told he would always have a limited ability to communicate and socialize. Due to careful, patient and professional attention from an EA, he is now able to communicate and work with other kids. He is now about to go off to high school precisely because of the improvement he's made alongside support from his EA.

Another child who refused to talk to other children or teachers and was always alone was transformed through her relationship with her EA, who helped to build her confidence, enabling her to socialize and to make friends at school. Another child who only attended school 20% of the time is now attending school 70% of the time. Why? Because an EA was there to help him patiently with his tasks. After months of progress, he told his EA, "What would I do without you?"

An EA named Maddy had a student in her grade 8 class who was self-harming at school. In one instance, she stayed at the hospital with this student for 12 hours until she was admitted, and continued to be her biggest advocate in order to ensure that she could get CAS support, a psychologist and a plan for her transition into high school. When she moved to remote learning in 2020, Maddy would meet with her remotely every lunch break because this student had no one else to speak with. Doing this work in a broken system was incredibly taxing for Maddy, but she knew it was important work. Maddy and this student have stayed in touch, and this student has now enrolled to volunteer in her class to help other students in need because of Maddy's impact on her life.

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The system simply couldn't function without these workers, our kids couldn't get by without these workers, but the minister doesn't think these workers are valuable enough to be paid a living wage. He doesn't think that the support they provide to our kids is important enough to ensure that our schools are actually able to hire and retain these workers.

These workers have been telling us that their backs are against a wall. They love our kids, they want to keep supporting our kids, but they can't afford to keep doing this work. The average salary is just \$39,000. Half of these workers have had to take another job just to make ends meet. Half of them have had to put off planned household spending. More than a quarter have had to cut back on food or use a food bank.

We already have a shortage of workers in this sector. As I have met with stakeholders over the past month as education critic, people from every part of the education sector—parents, trustees, principals, teachers and education workers—have all raised this concern with me. Roles are going unfilled, leaving the remaining workers struggling to fill in gaps to make sure our kids remain supported. In some cases, parents are being forced to fill in the gaps, including one parent we just learned about this past week who has to sit outside her daughter's school every day to make sure that her daughter can use the washroom. In other cases, kids with accessibility needs are being told they can only attend school on certain days or that they're not allowed to participate in certain activities because the supports aren't there for them.

Now with this imposition of an unreasonable collective agreement with only a nickel more per hour for these low-paid workers, the minister is ensuring that not only will these shortages remain unfilled, but we're going to lose even more workers.

I just want to pause here and acknowledge just how shameful it is that this Premier and this minister, both men earning over \$165,000 a year, are telling an overworked, underpaid and predominantly female workforce that they need to be “reasonable” about pay increases. A Premier who gave his whole caucus a \$16,000 a year raise as if it was candy on Halloween telling workers using food banks to be reasonable: It would almost be a joke, except that the consequences are no laughing matter.

Let’s hear what workers and parents have to say about this situation the government has created. One constituent in my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean has been an early childhood educator for over 35 years. She devotes hours of unpaid work each evening in the classroom just trying to catch up. In the midst of the pandemic, she spent hours ensuring that school would feel as close to normal as possible while keeping children safe and focused on learning. As an ECE, she cleans and disinfects her classroom constantly and ends up having to do the work of overwhelmed custodians because their workload is so excessive. Her working hours have increased exponentially because she recognizes that education is a priority, not a last resort.

But doing this extra work takes her time away from the children that need her support in the classroom. She has seen how the excessive demands on education workers have led to a large exodus of skilled workers as they become mentally exhausted from dealing with large amounts of stress. On top of that, she has seen multiple colleagues take on two jobs to support themselves, making it increasingly difficult for these workers to meet the needs of their own families and pay their own bills.

After 35 years, she is earning only \$38,000, and with the cost of living so high, she can barely keep her head above water. Her standard of living has dramatically decreased because her salary has not kept up for over a decade. She lives in social housing with rent-geared-to-income, but still often has to ask for help just to get her through the month.

As a parent and grandmother, she wants to see good-quality education programs in the classroom; as a registered early childhood educator, she wants to be respected for her knowledge, abilities, skills and experience. But this government isn’t willing to show her that respect.

Holly Rodrigue is a chief custodian at her school. She ensures that all garbage inside the building is picked up, that the bathrooms are cleaned and sanitized, the toilet paper replenished and she orders all of the supplies needed for her custodial staff. She says that sometimes she has people who come into the schoolyard at night and break glass or leave needles, leaving things that could injure the students. It’s Holly and her staff who ensure that these items are picked up. They need to be there to ensure that the school grounds remain clean. They’re the ones who are helping to keep our children safe.

Despite their important work, Holly says that inflation and wage cuts are making it extremely difficult for her and her staff to pay bills and make ends meet. She says, “We’re living cheque to cheque basically, so it’s very, very

important that we get a decent wage just to be able to live. I want to fight for things and have them in place and make sure that they’re there for the next generations coming up.”

Crystal, who lives in Ottawa West–Nepean, works as a library technician with the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board. She currently works part-time at two different schools but works full-time hours. She describes her days as exhausting, often getting home later than she anticipated, spending her evenings repairing ripped clothing for the next day because she cannot afford new clothes. She often comes home with drenched feet from standing in wet grass on yard duty because of holes in her shoes she cannot afford to replace. Crystal’s diet is heavily reliant on canned beans, rice, quinoa and salad. When she is really strapped, she has to rely on friends for meals. Crystal has described her day-to-day life as exhausting, chaotic and even traumatic. In one incident, Crystal witnessed a neurodivergent student throwing a 10-pound weighted ball around the classroom, which forced her to step in and calm down a roomful of students in tears while another education assistant put her body in the way to stop the student from hurting anyone.

As a library tech, Crystal interacts with up to 620 students on a daily basis. Every day she is at risk of catching COVID. Last year she caught COVID three times and had to isolate for at least a week each time. She used all her 11 sick days and was forced to go on short-term disability to cover the rest. She feels she is past her limit, stressed beyond belief, but cannot even afford to take a day off for her mental health because she’s used every one of her sick days.

Crystal loves her work and doesn’t want to do any other job. She feels so fortunate that she has the opportunity to meet these students so young and watch them learn and grow, that she can share with them her love of reading, of learning and a curiosity for the world around us. She strongly believes that students deserve respect, kindness, compassion and, most importantly, a safe and equitable learning environment.

The stress that is caused by this government’s willingness to take away her right to bargain is one more reason for Crystal to want to leave the field altogether. She is already on the brink and cannot fathom having to continue in this field without support from the government.

Nicola is an educational assistant with a lengthy list of responsibilities. She provides behavioural support, medical support, toileting, lifting children, yard duty and other daily tasks. Lately she has been integral in supporting children’s mental health in schools, which we know has suffered greatly throughout the pandemic.

Instead of supporting educational assistants like Nicola, this government has cut funding and prevented new hiring. Nicola says that this significant lack of staffing has made it impossible for children to access all the experiences that make school valuable for our children. For example, she knows that many clubs have been cut. Field trips have been cut because the support isn’t available to make them possible. Children who are struggling and need extra support are not able to access it because, again, the support just isn’t there.

If a staff member is sick and requires a day off, the lack of staffing prevents jobs from being filled, meaning children are often left without the assistance they require. Additionally, if a staff member is pulled from one child to work with another, the staffing shortage means that there will be a child in the building left without support, just because one child may need it more than another.

A fair living wage is not only very important to Nicola and her co-workers but also much deserved. They need more support to help them through the day, so that our children are getting the most out of their experience and are accessing all that is out there to help them reach their full potential.

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Another education worker reached out to me with concerns for her safety in the classroom. With so many staffing shortages, she and her colleagues are finding themselves in vulnerable positions, especially during incidents of violence. Workplace violence has become so normalized for her, and she is begging the government for more support. She shows up to support her students who struggle with aggression because they deserve support. It's important work, and if they aren't there for these students, nobody will be. All she wants is to be fairly compensated for this work and have the security of knowing that there will be other staff to help when she needs them. She does not feel supported by this government, and now even less so with their unwillingness to meet the basic needs of education workers across the province.

Sharon reached out to my office yesterday to express her concern for the state of our education system in Ontario. Sharon's grandson has ADHD and could not be in school without the help of education workers. She recognizes how important their role is and can see the change in her grandson when he does not have that support. Sharon fears what may happen if this government continues to exploit education workers, and what effect this may have on her son, who is dependent on his classroom support worker.

Recently, she learned that her grandson's worker earns just above minimum wage. As more and more education workers leave the field for jobs that pay a living wage, Sharon knows that it's only a matter of time before her grandson's education worker decides to do the same.

Christina called my office yesterday to express her frustration over the minister's back-to-work legislation. She has never before, in her life, called a government office, but she is beyond frustrated with the decisions of this government. She described this legislation as a complete overstep and an abuse of power. Her son relies on a tutor to keep up in school because he doesn't have the one-on-one support that he needs in the classroom. She cannot fathom why this minister feels that a \$200 support for tutoring is more important than providing education workers with an adequate wage increase and support. That \$200 will provide her son with a couple of weeks of one-on-one tutoring, but at what cost? The potential of losing more education workers who could provide him the support every single day or relying on education workers

that are overworked and overburdened with too many students' needs will be more harmful to her son's experience in the classroom.

Lisa is an ECE in my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean, and she told my office that she loves her career and her students. However, she cannot support her family with the wage she earns as support staff. If she didn't have the support that she does from her parents, she would not be able to keep a roof over her head, or feed and clothe her children. As it stands, Lisa sits around 15% below the cost of living in Ontario. The reasonable offer that this government has proposed will have her sitting somewhere between 20% to 22% below the cost of living in four years. She does not want to strike, but she feels she has to in order to support her family.

The minister's decision to invoke the "notwithstanding" clause impedes her right as a worker to negotiate a fair wage. Lisa would like to remind this government that on the playground, this is referred to as bullying, and she does not want to be bullied into an unfair contract.

Another Ontarian has expressed her frustrations over the difficult decision that she has been facing as guardian to a child with autism who was supposed to start school in September. She says that she fully supports education workers, but is terrified to send her child to a school with so few supports in place. She has been going back and forth on whether she should send him to school or not—a decision that no Ontarian should have to make. We owe it to our children to provide them with the resources they need for a successful school experience.

Jason, whom I mentioned earlier, has been grateful for the role of EAs in his children's learning, but he's seen first-hand the decline in availability of in-class EAs and resources. His children have suffered as a result of absent EAs because so many have left the field altogether due to burnout. In school, his middle child began to experience mild depression, anxiety and learning challenges. They've tried to work with the school administration to obtain additional support, but had very little luck because the school did not have adequate support for his child's educational and mental health needs. Jason had no other choice but to find an alternate school for his son.

His youngest child, who is currently enrolled in middle school with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, has also experienced a delayed response in obtaining adequate classroom support. There are no education support staff in his classroom, and only one resource teacher available to respond to his learning needs. There are hundreds of other children in this same position.

Now Jason's family is paying out of pocket for external support to assist his children, and during a time when the cost of living is already so high, this added cost is cutting into his family's grocery budget.

These parents and education workers are absolutely clear: If the government continues on this path of enforcing a low-wage policy and fundamentally disrespecting our education workers, it will be to the detriment of our children. Workers cannot continue in these conditions, and that means our kids will be forced to go without the

caring adults and the fundamental supports they depend on.

Of course, this government is not the first government to attack our education system and the people who work there. They're continuing a tradition set by the previous Liberal government, and that's part of what has gotten us into this mess.

The Liberal government, supported by the Conservatives, passed Bill 115, trampling on the rights of education workers to collectively bargain—a charter-protected right, I might add—and imposing a collective agreement that froze workers' wages.

The Ontario Superior Court of Justice recently ruled that Bill 115 “substantially interfered” with collective bargaining rights of education workers. The passing of this unconstitutional legislation resulted in the province being ordered by a court to pay out hundreds of millions of dollars in order to remedy their trampling of fundamental rights. These remedies, of course, do not recoup the lost income, benefits and rights of education workers in Ontario, but they show how expensive trampling on the rights of Ontarians can be.

In 2014 the Liberals, apparently thinking this was a fun game to play with people's lives, froze wages again for two years—four years, no wage increase.

Workers then had a couple of years of marginal wage increases, but in 2018, as we all know, the Conservatives came to power, and I guess they admired the Liberal approach so much that in 2019 they passed Bill 124, capping the wages of education workers once again.

So education workers have faced 10 years of consistent and sustained suppression and restraint on their wages from Liberals and Conservatives.

From 2012 to the end of 2021, wage increases for Ontario education workers have totalled only 8.8%. During that same period, total inflation was 19.5%. This means that these education workers, the lowest-paid education workers, took a 10.7% wage cut as a result of the government's wage freezes since 2012.

And now, with inflation running at over 8%, with an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, this government has come to the bizarre conclusion that the lowest-paid education workers, who are already using food banks, are only worth a nickel an hour more.

Unfortunately, Speaker, we've seen this movie before. The government's Bill 124 also imposed a wage cap on health care workers, showing them utter contempt and disrespect while they worked so hard each and every day of the past few years to keep us safe and healthy. We're seeing the outcome of that wage policy, with health care workers leaving the profession in droves. They are burnt out, tired of being disrespected, frustrated that they can't do the job that they love, the job that they want to do properly. And the result is that we have people waiting 12 to 20 hours in the emergency room, waiting 30 hours in the hospital to be admitted to a bed. We have pediatric ICUs that are life and limb only. We have cancelled and delayed surgeries and procedures, not because we don't

have the operating rooms but because we don't have the nurses to staff them.

I guess the government looks at that outcome and thinks, “Job well done. Let's try that with the education system next”—because that is what they are doing here. They are taking a system that is already starting to experience strain, and they are deliberately driving it closer to the brink.

In fact, this is straight out of the Conservative privatization playbook. First, you starve the public system of the funding it needs to do its job. Then you suppress workers' wages so they are earning less than their private sector counterparts. You burn out the staff with your deliberate underinvestment. And then they start to leave their profession to find other jobs that pay more or are less stressful. And that trickle of departing workers eventually becomes a raging river, because as the government makes the system deliberately worse, the workers who are now paid less have to do more, but the more that their fellow workers leave, the more they have to do to make up for that gap, which feeds the cycle, until you're faced with an inevitable crisis because of the actions of the government.

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Then, when the public system finally starts to break at the seams because the workers are burnt out, the system that used to be world-class has now become a shadow of its former self. That's when the Conservatives say, “How did this happen? No one could have predicted this result. The only way to solve this problem that we've caused is now to privatize the service.” And we know what privatized public services look like because they've done it before. It means poorer quality services. It means low wages. It means that people lose out to profit.

Now, let's compare that playbook with what the Conservatives are proposing here and what this bill will actually mean for our education system and our kids. Legislating poverty wages will mean that school boards will be unable to recruit and retain staff. This will lead to staffing shortages and cuts to services for students. Cutting job security means that burnout will increase the amount of staff and only make the staffing and retention crisis even worse. No new funding for additional staff means there will be no improvement to services for children and that the quality of their education will deteriorate. It also means that already overworked education workers will now be expected to do even more unpaid work, which leads to further burnout and to more staff leaving the profession. No agreement that casual workers be paid the same as permanent employees will only worsen the problem of recruitment and retention—you might be detecting a theme here, Speaker. Not only is the government doing all of this, but they're invoking the “notwithstanding” clause as they do it, acknowledging that they are trampling on charter-protected rights of Ontarians and flat-out admitting that they don't care. Cross the Premier and he will take away your rights: That's the message here.

The challenge we face as a province is clear: Is this a bill that will make our kids' education better? No. In fact, it will lead to a staffing crisis similar to the one we're

experiencing in the health care sector. Will it provide students with more supports? No, because burnout and staffing cuts will lead to fewer supports and fewer opportunities for Ontario students, not more. And lastly, will it make sure every child gets access to a world-class public education? Absolutely not. In fact, it ensures that kids who need support the most will get the least.

The minister's got three days, Speaker. The clock is ticking. CUPE is it at the table today. The minister should withdraw this shameful legislation and sit down at the bargaining table today with CUPE and negotiate a deal that will protect and strengthen our kids' education and support these invaluable workers who support our kids every single day.

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

MPP Jamie West: I want to start by thanking the member for Ottawa West–Nepean, our education critic. It is hard to believe that she is a new member to this Legislature. She is so well-read and well-informed on this file and speaks so articulately to it that I have nothing but the utmost compliments to say to her on behalf of the caucus.

Speaker, today we're here to discuss Bill 28, the Keeping Students in Class Act. The Conservative government is continuing their creative writing when it comes to bill names. I wanted to start off—yesterday, there was debate about us coming in this morning at 5 a.m. so that they can rush through this bill as quickly as possible. And the standing ovation the Conservatives gave themselves and the excitement that they had like it was Christmas morning—I'd like to remind the Conservative government that what you are rushing to do is trample on the rights of the lowest-paid workers in the education sector. What you're rushing to do is to punish people who are forced into poverty because of your legislation, who are forced to use food banks because of your legislation. And, excitedly, you give yourselves standing ovations.

I know, Speaker, there are some on this bench that know what they're doing is wrong and do not care. But there are some on this bench who, frankly, don't know, and I'm trying to reach out to you as a colleague and a friend to explain to you that you are hurting your constituents, and—sorry, Speaker—that they are causing harm to their constituents, and also to remind them that there are children living in poverty in their ridings that they could make a difference on and choose not to.

Yesterday the education minister spoke about the value of children going to school to get proper nutrition. Beside the education minister was the Minister of Labour, who applauded, ignoring completely the fact that more full-time working families than ever are going to food banks, ignoring completely the fact that the reason there are breakfast programs in schools is because parents can't put food on the table. They applaud like that's normal, like it's acceptable, like it's something that the Conservative government shouldn't be embarrassed about, that perhaps they should be champions and fix the problems that the Liberals created. They spent the last four years blaming

the previous government, blaming and pointing the finger. Well, news for the Conservative government, Speaker, is that they are the previous government. And the old adage, "Liberal, Tory, same old story," you've proven again and again and again.

I'm going to move forward to when they proved it again. Because this bill—very similar to Bill 124, very similar to Bill 115 that the Liberals brought in—is attacking the workers' constitutional right to collective bargaining. I'm going to get back to that.

I want to get to what I wanted to mention this morning. I woke up at 5 a.m. this morning—or before 5 a.m.; I was actually up at about 2:30 this morning, because when it comes to speaking on behalf of workers, I am excited and I am wide awake. And I'll tell you, I woke up this morning and I drove here in the rain, and when I walked around to the front, because the other exits are all closed this early in the morning, I felt bad for the staff that had to show up early. I felt bad for you, Speaker, who had to show up early, and the Clerks and the pages who had to show up early. But I couldn't stop but think about Mr. Moore.

Mr. Moore was a school custodian. He worked there for more than 30 years, in Toronto. He took care of his school. He cleaned it. And being a custodian is not a glamorous job. I was a custodian in my twenties—not in a school, but people don't make eye contact with you, they don't look at you when you're emptying the garbage, sweeping the floors and cleaning the bathrooms. Mr. Moore did this every single day with pride. He took care of the students. He showed up when he was sick because he knew how important it was. He showed up early when it was snowing to make sure there was salt on the ground. His wife stayed at home. Together they raised three children. And one of those children is my stepfather. And I know and value the importance of custodians like Mr. Moore because he raised a stepfather, and this stepfather, when I turned 16, helped to raise me.

So why are we here, Speaker? We're here to debate a massively thick bill. Bill 28 imposes the central terms of a four-year collective agreement on CUPE educational support workers, the school support staff, including educational assistants, custodians, librarians and early educational workers. This act requires the termination of any strike or lockout and prohibits strikes or lockouts during the term of the collective agreement.

I'm going to quote Patty Coates from the Ontario Federation of Labour: This is a "full-frontal attack on free and fair collective bargaining in Ontario. It is an attempt to strip workers of their most powerful weapon: the right to strike, the right to withdraw labour. And it's an attempt to strip the workers of this before they get a chance to use it."

Looking around the room, Speaker, as all of us are wearing poppies, I am reminded that in Sudbury, on Friday, we raised the largest poppy flag in North America. They're trying to find out if it's the largest in the world. It's something the city is very proud of. And all of us are wearing poppies. Next Friday, we'll go to celebrations, memorials for Remembrance Day, and we will talk about

our freedoms, and we will talk about the loss. I'll remember Mr. Moore, who served. I'll remember my father, Paul, who served; my grandfather George, who served. I'll remember especially Paul and George because those are my middle names. And I'll remember their comrades who didn't come back when they fought for their freedoms.

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I'm going to read you a section of the act. It's from the explanatory note, and I want you to think about freedoms and poppies and sacrifices that people made while I read this:

"The act is declared to operate notwithstanding sections 2, 7 and 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the act will apply despite the Human Rights Code.

"The act limits the jurisdiction of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, arbitrators and other tribunals to make certain inquiries or decisions. It also provides for there to be no causes of action or proceedings against the crown for certain acts."

I wanted to point that out because there's an opinion from the Conservative government that unions and their right to collectively bargain wasn't fought for, wasn't earned. Unfortunately, Speaker, I don't think the Minister of Labour knows the history of labour; I just don't. I saw this previously when the Premier was legislating power workers back to work before they even had a strike. They didn't understand, Speaker, that a strike vote just allows the union to show support; it doesn't mean they're going on strike. I had to explain it to them just before Christmas.

They don't understand how the legislation works. They don't understand that this was fought for—literally fought for—by people who died in the labour movement, spilled their blood for this in the labour movement. They either don't know, or they know and don't care. That is a theme with this Conservative government: They do not care about workers, they do not care about workers' families and they most assuredly do not care about their children.

I've talked several times about Charity. In August, I asked the Premier to ensure that Charity can get a wage high enough that she didn't have to go to food banks to feed her children. My compliments to Charity for allowing me to use her name, because I've heard this story from many workers who were too embarrassed to share their story, ashamed of where they work and the situation they're in—the situation that was created by the Liberal government and the situation that's been enhanced by this Conservative government.

I asked in August, and they refused. I asked again yesterday, and they refused. After that question, Charity reached out to me and said, "I'm honestly terrified. I just want to go grocery shopping. We deserve better than the food bank." I agree; the government doesn't agree. The Conservative government doesn't care about Charity, they don't care about Charity's children. They don't care that children in their communities have to go to food banks.

I can appreciate why they don't want to make eye contact, Speaker, because if I felt that burden of shame, I

wouldn't make eye contact either. I do not know how they look anyone in their communities in the eye, how they look at their parents, grandparents, children or friends and say, "You know what we did? You know what we did since we formed government in the last election? We rushed back here and we attacked old people in hospitals and forced them into long-term care that they didn't want to be in. Then we took a long break, because we can't ever sit during an election. Then when we came back, we attacked the lowest-paid education support workers in the province—and we celebrated with rounds of standing ovations and high-fives."

I want to propose something to you, Mr. Speaker: that the minister, although he spoke for an hour and spoke previously about this several times—I would like to encourage him, when you look at the size of the bill, to think that maybe all the effort in the bill, all the effort in the selfies, all the effort in the press conferences and the staging could have gone into negotiating. If you can muster the effort to get all of the MPPs here at 5 a.m., surely to God you can show up at a bargaining table and sit down and negotiate a fair contract.

Now, the government, when they speak about this contract, when they speak about their offer, what they use is lump sums. What they use is, "Well, if we do this, eventually it's going to be this because everyone in the world is going to have to get it." What they do is they talk about 11%. What they do is they confuse the issue. I want to bring the issue back to where it belongs. They're talking about an offer between 33 cents and 55 cents. Now, one of these education support workers told me that for her wages, because they're much lower than the average, it works out to a nickel an hour. This is another worker who is going to a food bank who doesn't want me to use her name. What they are offering, Speaker, is a nickel an hour to somebody who eats at a food bank. What they're saying is that if you don't accept that, "Too bad, because we've changed the rules and you have to. Even though you belong to a union and you should have the right to collectively bargain, we're taking it away before you can even withdraw your labour." What the Conservatives are doing, and excitedly so, is legislating poverty for these workers. That is shameful.

The Conservative government, time and time again, likes to talk about how the cupboards are bare: "Oh, we have no money. We don't have any money." They quote the EQAO stats and ignore the fact that it was one of their failed candidates that they gave this plum job to. I can't remember the exact number, but it's about \$140,000 a year. It used to cost about five grand a year and, quite honestly, I think anyone who really understands the EQAO would say that we should take that money and just reinvest it into the education system. It really isn't doing anything besides helping real estate rates. But if the cupboards were bare, maybe they would continue the program for five grand and not have to reward one of their friends. If the cupboards were bare, where would they come up with \$365 million as a catch-up amount?

I was watching interviews with this—because obviously we weren't sitting here, Speaker, at the time. I was

watching interviews, and they said, what would parents use the \$200 for? The minister said they could buy textbooks—

Interjections.

MPP Jamie West: I appreciate the member opposite for trying not to laugh.

Can you imagine, to your student—it doesn't matter if you're in primary school or secondary—that you go into their class and say, “Not to worry, you're going to catch up. I bought you a textbook”—clunk. Maybe they don't understand, Speaker, that the reason they have EAs, the reason there's a school system, the reason parents wholeheartedly did not support their online learning scheme the last time is because there's a value of someone teaching you. We don't just go, “It's time to start school, junior. Here's your textbook. Goodbye.” It is ridiculous. They got laughed out of the place for saying that.

Then I guess their comms team went to work and they said they could get tutors. You can get tutors. Some \$200—

Interjection: About an hour.

MPP Jamie West: An hour. Let's say you find a tutor who is willing to make a deal and it's \$50. You got four hours of tutoring to get you all caught up. So you come and you say, “Not to worry, junior, I know you fell behind, but I found a tutor. We're on a wait-list because everyone in the province is looking for tutors, but when he gets here it will be four hours and you'll be all caught up.” It is ridiculous.

The most embarrassing, the most ridiculous thing and the most insulting part of this, Speaker, is when they said, “And an extra \$50 for special needs.” Well, that's solved, I guess. When I heard that, the first thing I did is I contacted a family I knew who have two children with autism spectrum disorder and I told them, “Your problems are solved because there's 50 bucks coming.” I say that in jest, but there's nothing funny about this, Speaker.

This is a government that, when the Premier was running in 2018, promised autism families they would never have to protest on the front lawn of Queen's Park—never have to protest. The only reason they haven't lately is because COVID prevents it, but we know, those of us who were here then, that they protested so loudly that we could hear it through the walls. There is a reason that #50KIsNotOK is trending, because there are 50,000 children on that wait-list.

Miss Monique Taylor: Fifty-six.

MPP Jamie West: Now we've got to change the hashtag: 56,000. I don't know if you're going for a record.

When you talk about “the cupboards are bare,” we don't buy it. It's not because we're the opposition, it's because we believe in facts. We believe in the Financial Accountability Officer. There is \$44 billion in unallocated funds. There is \$25 billion in surplus. Conservatives say they have no money, but the FAO says you do. And what I'm saying is, maybe crack your wallet a little bit to pay people who are going to food banks while working full time.

0700

The Conservative government will tell you, “This is about the children. This is about keeping children in

class,” and, essentially, it is. That's where we agree. We need to keep children in class. And there's an opportunity for the government to do this, and the way the government can do this is by coming to the table and negotiating a fair deal.

The Minister of Education said, “Well, what would that mean to you?” Well, first of all, I think the Minister of Education should go to the table and understand what it would mean to those CUPE members, because they would explain it to him. But he's created a false analogy that the only way this can move forward is if we ram it through. The only way we can solve this is to ram it through, and that is not how negotiations work.

The reality—and I love this quote; I say it often—is that you recognize good negotiations when both sides walk away with a pebble in their shoe. There is a stone in the education support workers' shoe. I think the stone, actually, is being held over their head and ready to drop on them. There is nothing in their shoes on the Conservative government's side.

What we could do is we could invest in public education instead of starving it out. I think that our education critic was right on the money when she said that this is the Conservative game of starve to privatize. We saw this with long-term care. We're seeing it happen now with health care. Just a quick show of hands if anyone's excited to get into long-term care because it's privatized and it's going to be much better? Crickets. So, nobody. Good, good—we're all on the same page.

Health care will be probably very similar to long-term care. And education, if it's privatized, will be probably pretty similar to long-term care as well.

So let's invest in education, in public education. You worry about kids falling behind and getting caught up? Me too. So let's avoid the strike by negotiating with them. Let's invest in these workers that help them be successful. Let's invest in these workers, the most vulnerable workers, who take care of our most vulnerable students to ensure their success. That's the solution we can do.

They say it's about the children. I mentioned already how they completely ignore children who have autism, but I want to remind the Minister of Education that during his speech, he talked about the importance of having children in the classroom, and I guess he forgot that for about, I would say, nine months straight, he said we need two mandatory courses of online learning. Do you know who the most vocal people were about that? Not education workers; parents and students saying, “That is a bad idea.” And he didn't listen to them then.

He didn't listen when parents said, “I would like smaller class sizes,” and this was before COVID-19, when parents said, “Do you know what gets good attention? A smaller class size. It's better for my kids.” I've said a couple of times in this room that I have never met a parent who said, “I wish my class sizes were larger so my kids had less attention.” And I'm encouraging you to take the advice, to invest in the next generation so they'll be successful.

I want to talk about some of the stats here: education worker wages compared to economic indicators, per cent increases from 2012 to 2021. So I'm just going to do inflation and education worker wages. In 2012, inflation was 1.4% and education workers' wages went up zero. In 2013, it was 1% and education workers' wages went up zero. In 2014, inflation was 2.4% and education workers' wages went up zero. In 2015, inflation was 1.2% and education workers' wages went up zero. Oh, they got a raise the next year: In 2016, inflation went up 1.8%; they got a raise of 1%, a 0.8% cut. In 2017, inflation went up 1.7%; they got a raise of 2%. In 2018, inflation went up 2.4%; they got a 1% raise. In 2019, 1.9%; they got a 2.5% raise. In 2020, inflation went up 0.7%; they got a 1% raise. In 2021, inflation was 3.1%; they got 1%.

The minister, the Premier, the Conservative caucus, Speaker, are very excited that they're going to get another pay cut because of inflation. They want to talk about percentage increases over time and what it's going to add up to. But we know—every single one of us who are in this House know, because we knocked on doors—inflation is through the roof. It's the number one topic for every constituent in our riding. And we know that this will be a pay cut disguised as a raise.

Since 2012, increases for Ontario education workers' wages have totalled 8.8%. During the same time period, total inflation was 19.5%. That is a 10.7% wage cut over that time period.

I know that the Conservative government, the Conservative members, when they talk to people, when they go to the press, what they'll try to do is tie in teachers with education workers, and I want to be clear: We're not talking about teachers. We're talking about support staff and custodians and cleaners. We're talking about EAs and ECEs and DECEs. We are talking about the people who take care of the most vulnerable, the people who keep the place clean for us. They have been losing money time and time again, and their wages are at the rock bottom—the rock bottom.

Now, a trope that you'll hear time and again is that the public sector gets so much money, and it's not even aligned with the private sector. Well, if you do the math from 2012 to 2021, workers' wages increased 8.8%—ignoring that inflation was 19.5%—but the private sector had an increase of 20.3%. So that is a myth, and I'm happy to correct you so you can correct it when you go talk to people.

This year, the Bank of Canada is projecting that inflation will be 7.2% and continue to climb. That's something we're going to have to deal with, Speaker, for all sectors, but in this one what we're doing is taking people who are going to food banks and saying, "You're going to keep going to food banks, because the Conservative government frankly does not care about you or your children." And that is shameful.

Let's talk about the Liberal and Conservative plagiarism, I guess. In 2012, education workers were hit with Bill 115. I remember that, because I came down here as a steelworker and walked with education workers. It was

snowing out—kind of a lovely day, really, for that time of year. But they froze wages for two years.

The NDP politely explained to the government, "This is a mistake that you're making. You're violating constitutional rights, and it's going to be challenged in court, and you're going to pay the cost of court, and you're going to pay penalties." They pooh-poohed it, and the Liberals said, "That will never happen."

You fast-forward and—I forget the exact number: \$226 million? Over \$200 million in penalties, plus the legal challenges. I know that the government is, I guess, comfortable just wasting taxpayers' money by paying lawyers and paying these fees afterwards, but it's a bad thing to do. Following that—let me move forward, actually, because of time.

In 2019, the Conservative government thought, "Bill 115—what a great idea. We should do that, but why just limit it to education workers? There are so many public sector workers that we could punish and harm. So let's bring in Bill 124." And they stuck to their guns on Bill 124 all the way through.

Every time they rose and spoke about health care heroes and how important they were, I can only imagine nurses and PSWs and caregivers and lab techs throwing up in their mouth, because you cannot say, "I care," and "You're important," and "Thoughts and prayers," while suppressing their wages and violating their collective agreement rights.

0710

There are 55,000 members of this union that are going to be affected by this—55,000 members. I heard the Minister of Education speak about this, and I don't even remember him talking about any of those workers. Frankly, Speaker, since I have been here, I haven't seen this government speak to workers a lot, in general. I haven't seen them meet with the OFL. I haven't seen them connect. If you want to make good legislation, talk to people. Even if you think that you're right, find out if you are by speaking with them.

On this side of the House, the NDP is bringing stories of these education support workers to you and talking about the trouble they're having. You've got to take your fingers out of your ears and you've got to listen to them. I want to share some of these stories, in their own words.

This comes from a DECE, a designated early childhood educator: "I cannot get my son who has ASD the services he needs to thrive."

An educational assistant: "I have to work an extra four to five hours at another job several times a week and also most weekends to be able to provide for my family. These hours are after I've worked all day with students with severe needs and behaviour and I'm exhausted. I barely get to spend time with my children.... My heat, hydro and grocery bills have tripled in the last two years alone. I can't repair my car.... Being a single parent, I don't have anyone to rely on but myself."

This part hits me hard, Speaker: "This job is killing me, ruining my relationships with my family and preventing me from having any social life.... Loving my students is

no longer enough to justify staying in this job much longer”—after 18 years with this board.

A library worker: “We have had to borrow money to meet basic needs that has put us deeper in debt. Cost of living goes up at a way faster rate than my pay.”

Central administration—it used to be “secretaries,” in the old days: “Have to sacrifice my essentials to provide my child with essentials. Miss out on time with friends due to working a second job. I have collected beer cans to fund my child’s sports.”

A secretary, another clerical worker: “Have had food insecurity multiple times this year.”

Another worker, who’s talking about the source of stress from having a lack of money for his wife and him: “Our children also see and feel this stress, and feel guilty about asking for money for things like sports, extra-curricular or going out for the subway with their friends.” Imagine, as a parent, saying, “I don’t know if I have money for you to take the subway because the Minister of Education, the Minister of Labour and the Premier don’t care about us.”

Maintenance and trades—I’m running out of time, Speaker, but this is important; We’ve talked countless times about the importance of the trades and bringing trades forward, and how we’re losing trade workers: “Working with board has depleted any savings I have from a job before working at board. The cost of living, food, fuel, repairs and unexpected expenses have grown so high, we cannot live but paycheque to paycheque, and that’s sad for any multi-ticketed” tradesperson “to have to go through.”

Two more: “As a professional, well-educated person, I shouldn’t have to go without eating for a few days because I simply cannot afford to get groceries.”

And the final one I want to talk about is an educational assistant: “I’m staying in a non-functioning marriage because apart we will not be able to separately afford to live.”

With 20 seconds on the clock, Speaker, I want to remind the government: These are situations that they create, that they endorse, and that this legislation will force onto them for another four years. It’s shameful. They should be embarrassed. We will never support this bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Question to the members who just made the presentation?

Ms. Laura Smith: To my friend on the other side: CUPE is asking for a compensation increase of 50%. Okay?

Interjections: No, they’re not.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Ms. Laura Smith: Our offer is in line with most public sector settlements in this province. In fact, some would argue that custodians who work in schools actually make more within the school board than they do in the private sector. So could the member on the other side please outline why the offer is unreasonable?

MPP Jamie West: First, thank you to the member opposite for her question. I’m just going to be honest with you: You have workers going to food banks to feed their

children. That’s why I think your offer is not reasonable. That’s why anyone in this province would think your offer is not reasonable—sorry, Speaker, through you.

I am so frustrated. I have said this time and time again: Nobody working full-time in this province should go to a food bank. Food Banks Canada produce stats every year in Ontario; in 2018 or 2019, we finally tipped over: that there are more people than ever before working full-time jobs. These are those workers going to food banks, hat in hand, embarrassed to get food for their children because they don’t have enough money—because they hold the purse strings and think it’s fine. Shameful.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Sudbury for your excellent presentation.

This government this morning talked about how they were doing this for the kids. I would love to hear your summary of how this government has hurt kids in schools over the last four years.

MPP Jamie West: There is a long list, but the first thing that pops to mind actually happened more than four years ago. Prior to 2018, when I was running to be the candidate—I wasn’t even the candidate for my riding—I met with Sean and Julia Staddon and they told me about June. The member from Nickel Belt had brought forward their story several times to the Liberal government about the need for funding and support because their daughter, June, has autism. Their son, Chaz, is now June’s age then. Neither June nor Chaz have had any support from the Conservative government. June had none from the Liberal government and the Conservatives copied their playbook.

That is one example. A hashtag that trends on Twitter is #50KIsNotOK. That number continues to grow. So whenever I hear the Conservative government stand up and say, “It’s about the children. We care about the children,” you could prove it by clearing the autism wait-list, and you choose not to.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Good morning, Speaker, and through you to the member opposite: I think it’s entirely unreasonable that CUPE is refusing to compromise on their unreasonable demand of a 50% overall increase in compensation.

By way of example, the federal government right now is offering their workers approximately a 2% annual increase, and according to Statistics Canada, the average annual increase in labour talks in 2022 for the private sector is 1.8%.

We all know about the negative effects that a strike would have on our students, their learning and their mental health, but could the member opposite please explain the effects an enormous 50% increase in CUPE compensation would have on the taxpayers and the parents here in Ontario?

MPP Jamie West: I don’t know where they get their numbers, Speaker. Let me reread again—

Interjections.

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

MPP Jamie West: You guys should have slept in today.

If you look at inflation, year after year inflation goes up but their wages don't, to the point where they're going to food banks, to the point where they can't feed their children. So every time you stand up and you use 50% or you use bulk numbers, you are ignoring the fact that employees of this government go to food banks and you legislate it. You can spin it anyway you want, but when you go in your communities and you see people and you can't look them in the eye because they can't afford to feed their children, it's because of your votes on this bill. You choose to do this. You choose to harm them. You choose to ignore the peril that they're in, the financial stress—

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

0720

MPP Jamie West: Thank you for the reminder, Speaker.

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

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: I've negotiated for 21 years, and I know my colleague has also negotiated, and we know that 98% of negotiations don't end up in strikes.

We heard the minister this morning talking about 72 hours to the deadline. Anybody who has negotiated in their life knows that deals get done at the last minute. Why? Because both parties—and you talked about the rock and the shoe. Anybody who negotiates knows that. So the minister should do his job, sit at the table and get the deal done.

I'm asking you, since you have experience: What do you think this government should do to get this deal done?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague.

The reality of this is about the need to negotiate. The Conservative government has implied several times that the union wants to strike. The union doesn't want to strike. I've been on strike—I never wanted to. It has to do with a fair bargaining agreement. The pebble and the shoe—the reason people sign is because things are fair, and the reason they withdraw their labour is because things are unfair.

The member is absolutely correct that negotiations typically go down to the wire, but only when parties are interested.

When you have a government that is preparing for a strike, when they put this much effort—this giant bill—into it instead of negotiating, they are not dedicated to resolving this. They're not dedicated to keeping children in class. They're dedicated to punishing these workers who are standing up for their rights. That's their priority; it isn't feeding children, it isn't about a decent wage for hard-working families. It is about punishing people and flexing their muscles.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Markham–Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: Our government is committed to keeping students in class. The government of Ontario has

been engaging in negotiations with education sector unions following the expiry of their collective agreement on August 31, 2022. As of today, it's more than two months.

Why do the NDP support a strike and keeping students outside the classroom? Why do they ignore the fact that students have to be in the classroom? And why do they punish students and their parents?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Markham–Unionville for his question.

This is something I would call a straw man argument. That is when you put up something that has no substance and you pretend that it's factual and that it's something you can press against, but, like straw, it would bend and flop over with any decent argument.

The reality is, we're not in favour of a strike any more than you are. We're not in favour of students out of school—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I caution the member on his language.

MPP Jamie West: Oh, my apologies, Speaker.

I want to be clear: We are aligned on the need for children to stay in class. We are aligned on the importance. But where we divide is that we believe there is a way to do this through negotiation, and not through legislation that will harm workers and that will punish people. There's a better way.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a quick question to the member from Sudbury.

I don't think that folks even need a labour background to have an appreciation for the egregious approach that the government is taking, because even in the explanatory note, before page 1 of the bill, it says, "The act is declared to operate notwithstanding sections 2, 7 and 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the act will apply despite the Human Rights Code." So they set it up that they know that it violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Human Rights Code, and that it can't be held accountable by the labour board and all that. How should Ontarians interpret that?

MPP Jamie West: I know I have very little time, but what I want to say is that each and every one of us is wearing poppies because rights were fought for by people who literally gave their lives for them. This tramples over it. And they proudly put it on the first page that they are proud to trample on the rights of Canadians.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's my honour to rise in the House as the MPP for Perth–Wellington and the parliamentary assistant—one of two—to the Minister of Education to speak on the Keeping Students in Class Act, 2022. It's also great to see our colleagues here this morning at 5 a.m. I think of all the workers today that woke up before sunrise to go to work, and I'm glad we're here to debate this important legislation, Mr. Speaker.

This past September, students from across Ontario began their school year normally for the first time in nearly

two years. Speaking to parents and students across both Perth and Wellington counties, and indeed the entire province, the response has been uniformly concrete: Our kids must stay in class from September to June.

Earlier this fall, I had the privilege to attend a commencement in my riding, as I'm sure many other members in this place are doing as well. It was wonderful to see the community, staff and students come together again in person to celebrate their achievements. However, it was the speech from the valedictorian that struck me the most after I left, and I feel it is necessary to share some of what was said with this place. She said that while she was truly grateful to attend commencement and to see her friends and teachers again, she and her classmates "were robbed of their high school experience" because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a powerful address—

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I'll get to questions later; don't worry, to the member from Waterloo.

It was a powerful address to parents, community members, students and educators in attendance.

I've had the privilege to speak to a couple of classrooms as well since my election, including one grade 11 classroom recently. Speaker, to see students back in the classroom learning and rebuilding relationships was heartening, but it was also informative for me. One student told me that she was just happy not to be learning through a screen anymore. Mr. Speaker, the learning disruptions caused by the pandemic resulted in hardship in every student. However, in this grade 11 class, I saw students nearing the end of their high school journey, making important life decisions and learning critical skills, and realized that they cannot suffer from disruptions anymore.

Now is the time for concrete action that will make sure students stay in school. We know that school is not just a place for learning but also a place to make many feel supported and grow. Returning to school with a full slate of extracurricular activities has allowed students to regain lost skills, improve their mental health and physical health and to have some semblance of normal in their lives again. In short, we will not allow students to be robbed of their school experience.

We in this House must recognize how important a normal, stable and enjoyable school year is for parents and their children across the province. We must also fully recognize that two years of pandemic-related learning disruptions have left Ontario students in need of a plan to help them recover from learning loss over this period. Parents across Ontario know there is no substitute for in-person learning. We now have access to irrefutable data telling the tragic story of learning loss due to the disruptions over the past couple of years. The EQAO assessment results from the 2021-22 school year revealed exactly what parents throughout the province have been saying: Our students have seen decidedly weaker grades across all levels, particularly in the subject of math. Additionally, results from assessing reading and writing in our earliest learners has revealed a sharp decline in pre-pandemic testing. It is true that other jurisdictions around

the world have shown a similar decline in math, reading and writing scores for their students. However, we as legislators cannot accept this to be the norm.

We now know the root cause of decline of these scores: disruptions to in-person learning. Speaker, that is why our government made every preparation to require students to be in in-class learning, on time and in person, so that kids could catch up on their learning, develop life skills and job skills required to succeed in the modern, 21st-century world, and simply to see their friends again in a normal classroom. Ontario's Plan to Catch Up was informed through expert consultations to ensure a return to a normal school year—nothing short of a whole academic year.

0730

Returning to the classroom means making the necessary investments to do so. I'm proud to say this government has risen to the occasion on this matter. This government is making historic investments to provide top-quality publicly funded education for our children—

Interjection.

Mr. Matthew Rae: I'm getting to the best part, member from Brampton North.

These investments include an additional \$683 million in this budget we just passed for this year's funding to school boards, for a total of \$26.6 billion. I want to compare this to the NDP-backed Liberal government just a few short years ago, Speaker. Our Progressive Conservative government and this Premier are investing more than \$2.7 billion this year compared to the final year of the last previous Liberal government. This clearly demonstrates our commitment to improving student success, in contrast to the failed policies and practices of the previous NDP-backed Liberal government. These investments will go directly into our children's classrooms to ensure they receive the top-quality education they deserve and the high standard of learning parents rightly demand.

What our students learn in the classroom is directly correlated to their future success. As such, we must continue to update Ontario's various curricula, guaranteeing the instruction of necessary life and job skills to support a family and one day realize the dream of home ownership, and everything else included in the Canadian dream.

The previous Liberal government failed at nearly every turn to ensure our children's studies kept up with the changing times. Neglected by the previous Liberal government, Ontario schools failed to address a rapidly changing world. I'll provide an example, Speaker: Ontario's elementary science and technology curriculum, which this government, under Minister Lecce, swiftly modernized, was last updated in 2007, the year Facebook and Twitter came online. This is unacceptable, and our government has made it a priority to constantly look for new ways to update and modernize curricula in ways that best work for students.

Another example includes Ontario's grade 9 math curriculum, which the Liberals neglected to update since 2008, the same year the iPhone 3G was introduced. This neglect was shameful, and that's partly why, in 2018 and

again in 2022, the people of Ontario sent the Ontario Liberal Party to be independent members on the opposite benches in record-low numbers, and elected this party and this Premier, not once but twice, with a greater majority. Speaker, in doing so, the people of Ontario have given our government a renewed mandate to ensure student success is well-funded and looked after, and, most importantly, that students remain in class.

Ontario's students deserve to learn in an environment that best equips them for the future. Our schools will finally include financial literacy, something the opposition previously neglected. For the first time, Ontario students will learn about mortgages, interest payments and the impacts of debt accumulation. These are foundational aspects of sound fiscal management which will help them succeed in life.

Students in Ontario and, indeed, across this nation and the western world have experienced declines in math. This cannot be understated, and we will not allow it to be so. We are investing \$25 million in a new skills-focused curriculum that will ensure every board has a math specialist available with a special focus on early intervention. This government is also fighting the unions in court to ensure educators meet grade 9 math standards. Our students deserve no less than this common-sense requirement for education, and our government will keep taking every step necessary to ensure teachers are well-equipped to do their job.

For the past four years, this government placed a critical emphasis on science, engineering, technology and math, or STEM studies, in our classrooms. These subjects contain not only the keys to many successful futures for our students, but they represent areas of need in this province that will grow as time progresses. The success of Ontario's future economy depends on the actions we take now. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government is ensuring that students will now explore how science relates to careers in the skilled trades and how emerging and new technologies impact these careers. These new learning expectations within the curriculum will ensure Ontario's students are at the forefront of emerging innovation and thought, and able to compete in the global economy.

Our government has transformed the curriculum to now emphasize STEM education across all grades, embedding life and job skills that will support the next generation of scientists, innovators and entrepreneurs. For the first time in Ontario's history, the revised curriculum includes required learning on real-world connections between science, technology, engineering and mathematics. And it includes food literacy. Coming from Perth–Wellington, it is great to see that that is included in the curriculum as well at such a young age, teaching our students the importance of our agricultural sector, food and healthy eating.

This government is also committed to building state-of-art schools which will play a major role in providing top-quality education spaces for Ontario students who need them now more than ever. Our classrooms are critical to the learning recovery for our students.

But, Speaker, we know that success inside the classroom can always use some help from outside the classroom. It is for this reason our government invested \$176 million to expand free school-based—through school boards—tutoring supports, the largest publicly funded tutoring program ever in Canada for the students who need it the most. This investment will be used to improve the foundational reading and writing skills of our earliest learners, and to support them with better math literacy after a global decline during the two-year pandemic-related disruptions. This follows our government's \$15-million investment to deliver expanded summer learning opportunities.

Of course, Speaker, we know that schools provide much more than a space for education. Schools have always been important social settings for our kids to make friends and build life-lasting relationships. So it is clear, particularly for our young people, that pandemic-related disruptions have had a profound impact on the mental health of young people. Speaker, mental health is health. Our government and this Premier have made it a point to expand access to mental health supports well before the pandemic, but now more than ever, our children need our help.

This government is proud to have invested a historic \$90 million in mental health supports for students, including an additional \$10 million in new funding to expand access to much-needed mental health supports. For context, this investment represents a 420% increase on investment compared to the last mandate of the Wynne Liberal government. On this side of the chamber, we understand the critical importance that schools play in the lives of our students. That is why we must fight to make sure they stay in class, where they deserve to be.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support our newly re-elected government's continued determination to provide financial relief to hard-working Ontario families. It is real and tangible economic support at the most crucial of times that also respects the choice of parents. Through Support for Families, Support for Learners and the COVID-19 child benefit, our government, under our last mandate, made over \$1.6 billion available in financial relief to Ontario families in the uncertain economic times of the pandemic. Mr. Speaker, it was shameful that the opposition voted against all three initiatives to support families and provide relief.

Recently, this government has added to already historic levels of direct support to parents, as I mentioned, by announcing the education catch-up payments, which I am pleased to say, as of this morning, 972,000 families have applied for. This is \$365 million in financial relief put directly in the pockets of Ontario parents, which will help ensure our students recover from learning losses accrued during the pandemic and allow parents, who are best suited to make these decisions, to do so.

It is worth noting that every step of the way, as I mentioned, the NDP and the Liberals have opposed this financial relief because they believe in a one-size-fits-all approach drawn up by downtown Toronto bureaucrats far away from the families in need.

0740

There is only one political party in this Legislature which consistently stands on the side of parents, and I'm proud to be a member of that party supporting parents and providing stability to students at every turn.

CUPE's decision to walk out on students in this province by imposing a needless, but predictable, strike only proves their lack of support for the ones who need it the most: the students.

Speaker, I would like to take the time to set the record straight in this place: At no point, throughout the months of negotiation, has CUPE budged on their demand for a nearly 50% increase in compensation over four years—

Interjections.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's simple math that the opposition seems not to be able to do, Speaker.

While Ontarians in the private sector have faced wage stagnation and, in many cases, benefit rollbacks, CUPE believes it is reasonable to demand more than 11% in compensation annually for the next four years and, if not met, that Ontario students—who have suffered, as I've mentioned, extensively over the past two years—should be forced to bear the burden when the union once again goes on strike.

As education workers march steadfastly toward another strike, they're being offered a deal that includes salary increases, year after year, and the protection of one of the most generous pension benefit plans in the nation. This includes 11 paid sick days at full pay and 120 short-term-leave days at 90% of their salary. By comparison, a worker working the same job at Porter Airlines—a great company—receives just five paid sick days and a pension plan that is not even remotely comparable.

CUPE's eagerness to pursue another strike is unfortunate but expected. Education unions in this province have subjected parents and students to the same tactics of disruptions over many years. Before I was born, in 1989—since then, Ontario students have spent a total of 2,244 days out of the classroom due to union-driven strikes. Together, that totals over six years of being out of the classroom. To put that into context, that's more than a student would spend in all of high school, even when there was an additional year of instruction for grade 13. I remember the strikes when I was in school, as well.

And it doesn't matter the government: I want to remind members of all parties in this House that a common denominator of these strikes, as I mentioned, is not the Premier nor the political party. No, Speaker—for the NDP, in just one term—and I'm here to improve the name of Rae in this place—over 1,000 instructional days were lost in the classroom due to union-led disruptions. My Liberal colleagues in this House faced the same types of walkouts and school closures. For nearly—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the official opposition to come to order. The member for Perth–Wellington has the floor.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Nearly 350 days were spent out of the classroom under Liberal Premiers.

There is only one commonality in classroom disruptions, and it occurs almost like clockwork. That commonality, Speaker, is the education unions. That's not fair, that's not reasonable and it's not acceptable. To that end, we will guarantee Ontario students remain in the classroom where they belong, where they're best positioned to recover from the lost studies and learn the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. While CUPE is choosing to impose strikes on Ontario families, parents and kids, Ontario's government is choosing to keep kids in class.

To the grade 11 students I recently had the privilege to visit, those attending commencement, the students who are again learning in person and participating in extra-curricular activities, know this: Your government, Premier Ford, Minister Lecce and all of us on this side of the House will not allow your school year to be robbed from you. And to the parents of Ontario: You can be assured that your children will remain in class with a normal, stable, enjoyable school year from September to June.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions for the member for Perth–Wellington?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I have a scenario that's a true story. Teacher assigns a group project to the class. They assign a student with two other students in the classroom; one has a learning disability and the other can't read. The student withdraws from this group, moves to the back of the class and starts working on their own. Teacher calls the parent: "What's going on with the student?" Parent says student isn't able to teach the other student to read and cope with the learning disability of the other student in the group.

Speaker, how does this bill help students' experiences and not rob a student of learning by attacking workers? How do you explain how students are supposed to learn in class when you're not providing supports and EAs and giving them a fair wage? How is this not robbing? Your bill is robbing students of their student experience.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to caution the member on her use of language, but I will now allow the member from Perth–Wellington to reply.

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague for the question. Speaker, it gives me a great opportunity to highlight the investments we're making in budget 2022, which unfortunately the NDP voted against. We are providing \$300 million to hire more staff in schools—that's teachers and educational assistants—to the boards to hire staff. That is part of our \$600 million in additional money we're providing, and \$300 million of that is to the school boards to hire more staff. That's how we're providing the supports in the class.

To her question about this bill in particular, we're ensuring students stay in class so they can have those supports, and providing a good and fair deal to the union and CUPE.

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

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague from Perth–Wellington for his wonderful presentation. He gave a lot of facts about the education system—how we

reform and how we modify the education system in Ontario after daycare.

My son Venorth is talking about mental health during this time. He just graduated as an automotive engineer. He's still suffering with his mental health. We even talked about it last week. He did some of the practical exams through the virtual. As an engineer, it's a difficult thing to do. I ask the member, why is the government not tolerating even one day of learning disruption? Is mental health one of the reasons?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my honourable colleague for that question. It's a great question. I'm sure we're all hearing this when we're talking to parents and students, the mental health effects of the pandemic disruptions. As I mentioned in my address, that is why our government was investing \$90 million this year in our budget—that's a historic investment—\$10 million more this year in mental health supports. But as I've seen in students that I have visited with community events and at schools and in classrooms, they are enjoying being back in the class, interacting with their fellow colleagues. So this bill will obviously ensure that there is no disruption to in-person learning moving forward, and thank you very much for the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to read an email from one of my constituents:

"Hello,

"We are parents of a grade 7 student...

"Our child is thriving this year and she is quite upset at the thought of school being disrupted, but she is also old enough"—

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: Please listen to the entire story—"she is also old enough to know that what Mr. Ford and Mr. Lecce is doing, is wrong. There is a process in place for negotiation and the government is unilaterally ignoring it.

"As parents and taxpayers, we are appalled at the heavy-handed approach to the lowest-income earners in the education sector...

"The cost of living has gotten out of control yet wages have not kept up." Then, they thank me for my time.

What I would like to know is, what does this member say to constituents whose emails he receives, I'm sure, quite the same within his own community?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Yes, I receive many phone calls and emails from both sides of this debate, which is great to hear. I always encourage constituents to reach out to my office and share their concerns with me.

0750

Our government has been at the negotiating table, as has already been mentioned, for over two months with this particular bargaining group, we offered them a fair deal, and they still chose to proceed with strike action. And we increased our amount this past Sunday, Speaker. We increased the amount to 10% over a four-year term for the lowest-paid workers: \$43,000 is the limit; we raised that

too. We provided an additional deal to them, and they still chose to pursue the strike. So, unfortunately, we are here in this place debating this piece of legislation to ensure students stay in school on November 4 and moving forward.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I just want to thank the member for speaking early today. Last night, because the House adjourned, I was able to go home and hand out treats to the kids who came to the door. It was so great to see the little ones dressed up in their princess and witch costumes and Superman costumes. You know what? Seeing the smiles on their faces, being together with their friends—and we had the opportunity to chat with some of the parents back and forth as they got their little bags of chips and went along in the neighbourhood. But the biggest part was the smiles on those kids' faces and the sociability of the kids being together.

I guess the question that I'm asking the member is, why is this so important for our children that we take care of this legislation today?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague, obviously, for that great question. The reason we're here this morning so early is to ensure our students are in class for the entire period from September to June, ensuring that they have the ability to interact with their friends in person, ensuring that they're able to learn in class and do projects together in class and to experience everything we all remember from our time in elementary school and high school and beyond. So this is why we are here today: to ensure that our students remain in class moving forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to relay some comments from a constituent of mine from St. Catharines, since I don't feel that a lot of the other members on the opposite side have actually had time to read these emails, but we've taken the time. I just want to quote a few things: "As an education worker, I have never felt more like giving up in my field as a library technician. I worked for 10 years as a casual employee making pittance above minimum wage with no paid sick time or benefits."

It goes on to say, "Ford is taking away the right to strike and refuses to bargain in good faith. The bullying must stop. Parents want their children to remain in school; some of these parents are also education workers. But those same workers must not be held hostage in schools to ensure that.

"Instead, Lecce must stay at the table and negotiate in good faith with the hard-working CUPE negotiation team."

I want to ask the member from Perth: Do you believe what you have said? Do you feel that five cents to the lowest-wage earners is good and keeping up with the cost of inflation—five cents?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague from the New Democratic Party for that question. The Minister of Education has been at the table, again, for over two months, and we provided an additional deal on Sunday

that was an increase in compensation for the lowest-income workers and an increase in compensation for everyone else as well over the term of the agreement, and they still chose to pursue the strike option.

We have been committed since the election—the Premier, the Minister of Education have been clear: We cannot tolerate any disruptions to in-person learning, so we will be in this House to ensure that students can remain in the classroom from September to June, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have time for one quick question.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to the member from Perth–Wellington for your passionate presentation. I am just as passionate as you are because the parents and students in Richmond Hill have been coming to me and they say now they are more relieved, because they thought there will be a strike. So I'm happy that we are working so hard to fight to make sure that the kids will be back in class. My question is, why is our government not tolerating even one day of learning disruption?

Mr. Matthew Rae: A great question. We are not having one day of disruptions. We're not allowing that to happen because that's how much we believe that they need to be in school—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you for the quick response.

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Spadina–Fort York and the member from Windsor West.

Speaker, this bill, Bill 128, is a contemptible bill. Some bills are like a fine steak. They're richly marbled. They're deep red. They're clearly an object of substance and nourishment. And others are like a hot dog that's been on a roller grill of a 7-Eleven for 24 hours—wrinkled, mysterious and oddly coloured.

This contemptible bill is that hot dog. Not only will it give political heartburn to anyone who actually votes for it, it will make people sick who have it stuffed down their throat. And that is the government's goal: to not only chew on it themselves, but also to stuff it down the throats of those education workers who were true front-line heroes through the height of the pandemic.

This government bill will destabilize education and shortchange Ontario families. For those who have suffered through and are suffering through the health care crisis that has been provoked by Bill 124, who have been in packed ERs—when they're open—they know that a bill that punishes those front-line workers, that demoralizes them, that drives them out of the sector is one that undermines the critical services that we need to have in this society.

And that's what this bill will do. It will beat up education assistants, early childhood educators, custodians and librarians. That process of driving people out has already started. I hear from parents now who tell me they are desperate to get support for their children in the classroom, but the wait for that support is backed up so that they don't get the assistance that they need. And that's even in a situation where those workers are doing the best they

absolutely can. They are committed to the children in their care, they work hard, but they can't keep up.

I've talked to those education assistants directly, at the door, who tell me about their desperation in trying to keep up with the demands, the needs of the children that they're responsible for. But they tell me they're short-handed and they can't do anything, but, every day, put on the equivalent of an educational Band-Aid to try and get through the day.

So this bill is about beating up on those workers. It's about undermining the quality of education in this province. To say otherwise is to subject the facts to the worst kind of abuse. When you decide to demoralize and drive out the very education workers that you need to make the system function, then you can't argue that your priority is education, that your priority is children and families. And when you look at this government's record on education over the last four and a half years, you can recognize quickly that any commitment or any claim they make to a commitment to Ontario's children and families is not a real commitment.

Speaker, I want to look at some of the extraordinary elements in this bill. There is a section entitled, "Application of charter and Human Rights Code and limits on courts, etc." This is the section that explicitly undermines human rights and constitutional protections. Now, most people don't spend a lot of time thinking about the Human Rights Code or the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or our Constitution, but when governments act in a way that is abusive, they somehow know there is a backstop, that there's legislation or laws in place that will give them protection against government acting in a way that is abusive, that is arbitrary, that is damaging.

In Canada, we have a problem with our Constitution in that we have something called the "notwithstanding" clause so that governments can declare what they brought forward is not covered by the Constitution. Legal experts have said that where this exemption is used, it should be used very sparingly. Well, I have to tell you, Speaker, this bill takes full advantage of that "notwithstanding" clause that exempts this bill from constitutional protections. When you do that, you're saying right off the top that you recognize that what you're doing is unconstitutional. You're not beating around the bush. You're not hiding this away in some obscure clause. You're saying right off, "You don't have any constitutional protection. We're taking that away from you. We're going to beat you up, and you don't have any legal option to fight back." That's what's going on. But that's not the end of the attack on our fundamental rights, because the bill also says explicitly that the Human Rights Code does not apply.

0800

What's extraordinary to me is that this government stopped there. They could have said the Employment Standards Act doesn't apply, or the Occupational Health and Safety Act. What about the Ten Commandments? Clearly, they were underperforming with this bill, because they could have tried to wipe out jurisdiction of any other law protecting workers. But I have to say, the damage they've done is enough.

I do want to note that the bill goes on for pages about how the government and its servants are protected, shielded, held harmless, explicitly exempt from any kind of legal action whatsoever with regard to fundamental laws in this society. You have to be doing some pretty grim stuff to put those sorts of protections for yourself in legislation. You have to be messing around at a pretty profound level to say, “We’re exempt from the Human Rights Code and from Canada’s Constitution.” You have to be very clear that you are putting aside people’s rights, that you are trampling on those rights, that you are stuffing this ugly mess down people’s throats. That’s the ground that’s cleared by these exemptions.

All of us in this society need to be protected from governments that go down the wrong road. When you use the “notwithstanding” clause, when you say that the Human Rights Code doesn’t apply, it isn’t just the workers in this case who will be harmed. Everyone in this society knows that the next time the government hits against this guardrail, that guardrail has been weakened.

So we’ve got a bill that not only undermines the quality of education and beats up on a dedicated group of people who are trying to give our children the education they need, but this bill hurts the quality of education and undermines our fundamental rights in this society. Speaker, that is simply wrong.

This bill needs to be withdrawn. It needs to be thrown out. This government needs to sit down with the education workers and actually negotiate, not dictate, and come to a deal that everyone can live with to protect the quality of education.

With that, I turn the floor over to my colleague.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: It’s important, what my colleague just said—you need to negotiate, not dictate.

This is the scariest bill that I think has been before this House during the four years that we’ve been in this House.

I’m going to dedicate my time today to my grandson Shea, who is 10 months old, and to the children I saw on Halloween at CityPlace—the Halloween crawl there last year—and to all the children in Ontario, because I want all of the children in Ontario to grow up in a democracy. And a democracy means that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the fundamental law of the land and nobody overrides the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I would ask the Conservative MPPs in this House: Why did you run? Did you know this government never said in their election campaign that they were going to be using the “notwithstanding” clause to override workers’ rights in this country? They never said that they were going to use the “notwithstanding” clause to fundamentally strip all of us of our fundamental rights. When people talk about the “notwithstanding” clause, most people don’t understand what that means.

In this bill, it specifically states that they are overriding sections 2 and 7 through 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Section 2 is our fundamental freedoms—freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of speech. Those are the fundamental freedoms.

So to the Conservative MPPs in this House: You are under extreme pressure from your caucus to vote today to suspend the fundamental freedoms of the people of this province—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I’m just going to ask the members to keep the chitter-chatter on this side to a minimum so that I can hear the member properly. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chris Glover: Sections 7 through 15 of the charter are our legal rights. These are the rights to life, liberty and security of the person; they’re the right against arbitrary detention; they’re the right to be called before a judge if you’re arrested. These are the fundamental rights that your government has put in this legislation that you are going to override—the fundamental freedoms and the legal rights of the people of this province.

This is a slippery slope, because the Premier has said in the past, when they used this before, “We won’t be shy about using the ‘notwithstanding’ clause again.” In other words, he’s not going to be shy about stripping the people of Ontario of their fundamental freedoms and of their legal rights. That is extremely frightening. And it’s not just—this goes across party lines. This is not a Liberal, Conservative, NDP debate; this is a debate about the fundamentals of our democracy.

I’ll give you some quotes from other people who commented on the last time this government used the “notwithstanding” clause.

Brian Mulroney, the former Conservative Prime Minister of this country, said the “notwithstanding” clause is a grave flaw and it makes the charter not worth the paper it is printed on.

Bill Davis, the former Conservative Premier of this province and one of the drafters of our Constitution, condemned the Premier’s use of the “notwithstanding” clause, and he said it’s because you’re undermining our fundamental freedoms and legal rights. That’s not what the “notwithstanding” clause was to be used for.

Roy McMurtry, a former Conservative cabinet minister in this Legislature, as well as former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and former Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow wrote, the last time this government used the “notwithstanding” clause, “We condemn the Premier’s actions and call on those in cabinet and caucus to stand up to him.” A former Conservative cabinet minister in this House was calling on the Conservative MPPs to stand up to the Premier, and he said, “History will judge you by your silence.”

Andrew Coyne, the Globe and Mail columnist, said, “The Ford government is exactly the kind of government the charter was supposed to restrain. Handing it the ‘notwithstanding’ clause is like handing a drunk a loaded gun.”

Amnesty International, which usually doesn’t have much to do with a democracy like Canada—it usually

deals with dictatorships or governments that are slipping into dictatorship, which is my big fear here, because we've watched, over the last 20 years, country after country slip into dictatorship, slip away from their democratic ideals. This government's got Amnesty International criticizing it, and Amnesty International is condemning the use of the "notwithstanding" clause because it exhibits this government's contempt for human rights.

And then the reason this government is doing this—so why use this loaded gun? Why strip Ontarians of their fundamental freedoms and of their legal rights? It's because they want to impose a settlement on the lowest-paid education workers in our province—the ECEs, the special-needs assistants, the office administrators, the custodians, the librarians, the people who look after our children in schools all day. This is what this government wants to do.

I'll just give a couple of examples of how low this is. One ECE says she is currently homeless, lives in her car and in shelters, and she's dealing with pain and food insecurity—and this government is trying to impose a cap on their wages.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Something that I really want to point out here, because all I'm hearing from the government side—I'm not surprised; they're Conservatives—is anti-union rhetoric. So I want to be clear: These education workers, the lowest-paid education workers, who make on average \$39,000 a year or less, are not on strike. They're not on strike. It hasn't happened yet. And yet you have this bill that you tabled yesterday ready to go, and stand here and attack these workers. You talk about them keeping students out of school—these workers aren't on strike. CUPE education workers have had zero days over the last eight years of being on strike. They're not keeping kids out of classrooms, this government is keeping kids out of classrooms. That's what's happening.

0810

As my colleague from Davenport pointed out, because of this government's bad policies and lack of investment in the education system, there were 27 weeks that schools were shut down—27 weeks, the worst record in Canada and one of the worst in the entire world. It was you keeping kids out of school, and you know, while you were doing that, these education workers, these EAs, were still in the classrooms supporting some of the most vulnerable students. And you have the nerve to bring this kind of legislation forward and to sit there, smugly mocking me for what I've said, and attack these workers.

My colleagues that have spoken so far have all done a wonderful job of talking about how these workers work two, three jobs in some cases and have to go to the food bank to feed their families.

The Daily Bread Food Bank put out a report. The title of it: Government Public Policy Drives Number of Food Bank Visits. It's a new report. Government policy—your policy—is driving the increase in the need for food banks. And when you all stand over there, especially the Minister

of Education, and say, "This is about equity of access. This is about food security for students"—if you weren't suppressing the wages of these education workers, if you weren't suppressing the wages of our health care workers, if you weren't suppressing the wages of those that work in developmental services, they wouldn't be relying on food banks. It wouldn't be happening.

And because you all seem completely unaware of the reality in the education system, it's the education workers, out of their own pockets—those lowest-paid education workers, making under \$40,000 a year—who are then taking money out of their own pockets to ensure that those students, when they come to school, have something to eat, to ensure that in the colder months they have a coat and a scarf and mittens. Because not only are you undervaluing and underpaying their parents and forcing their parents to go to food banks, you're doing it to the workers in the education system and then saying, "Hey, it's those greedy workers that are causing the problem." That's what you're saying. It's absolutely shameful.

I want to point out what my colleague pointed out, that there are 73 people on that side of the House—just after this election alone. The Premier increased, created—magically created—parliamentary assistants, who got a \$16,000 pay bump. They were making \$116,500 a year already, plus expenses, and they got \$16,000. But these folks, who make under \$40,000 a year, are greedy and unreasonable? Are you kidding me?

Should we talk about the ministers on that side of the House, that during the election it came out that the ministers—\$165,000 a year, plus expenses—were taking money from their riding associations and saying, "Totally acceptable. We're struggling to cover the cost of food and everyday essentials." Are you kidding me? And then you stand here with this bill?

Speaker, in the last minute and a half that I have, I want to point out—I have to point out—these education workers: largely a women-led profession. Nurses: largely a women-led profession. Developmental service workers: largely women-led. We don't see this government coming for the public servants that are largely led by men in the field.

What this legislation says to every single woman in this province—and I cannot believe that we're still having to have this conversation and debate this crap and have this fight—what this is saying to every woman in the province is what they've been saying for centuries—centuries—to women: "Just go sit in the corner over there and be quiet." These women are speaking up, and you're saying, "Go sit in the corner and be quiet. Here's the scraps we're going to give you, and you'd best be happy about it. And because you actually"—heaven forbid, as a woman—"had the nerve to speak up and fight back," this government brings in this kind of legislation—

Interjection: Bullies.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:—to bully women and to say, "We don't value you or the work that you do. We know better."

Speaker, I can tell you that this side of the House and the women in the education sector, in the health care

sector, in developmental services and everywhere else in the province are saying to this government, you just woke a beast, because we're not going to take it anymore.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to questions.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I hear the passion from the member from Windsor, and I'm just wondering if she can speak about these workers who are amongst the lowest paid in the education system. It feels very oppressive, what the government is doing to them. You're right, we do have to speak, because this legislation effectively silences them. So if you could just talk about these rights, these fundamental rights, particularly for those workers who are female and who do need their representation to speak up for them, but everyone is being silenced by this bill.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I appreciate the question and the opportunity to speak more on that. Again, this sends the message to women that we don't value you. We don't value you. We expect you to do the work, but we don't want to pay you for it. We expect you to carry the load, but we don't want to acknowledge how hard that is.

We're talking about school secretaries. When a child falls on the playground and gets hurt, it's the school secretary that cleans them up, puts on a Band-Aid if needed and shows that care and compassion to make that child feel better.

We're talking about educational assistants who deal with students with developmental disabilities, some of the highest needs in the school system. They get kicked, they get punched, they get bitten. They wear Kevlar all day long. Does anyone on the government side have to wear Kevlar or put up with that throughout their day? They do it with compassion, and they do it because they love their students.

We're talking about ECEs, who are supporting the youngest learners through some of the toughest developmental—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Question? The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Close enough—it's Essex.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): You're not sitting in your seat. I can't get you to ask a question. You're not sitting in your seat, are you?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: That's Essex.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): It is? I'm very sorry. The member for Essex, go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: It's very early in the morning, and it's quite something to see this House with so many members present this early in the morning for this kind of debate. It's a very important debate, and everybody has been participating to the best of their ability.

I'm a father of three. I can remember my kids going up through the school system. I still have one young 'un. He's still in high school, and he wants to be in high school. He wants to be in his classroom. He wants to be with his peers. He wants to be with his teachers. I know the teachers want to be there, too. I know everybody wants to be in the classroom, including all of the people we've been talking

about here today. I think, after two years of disruptions caused by an international pandemic, everybody wants to be in the classroom. So my question to the member is this: Why is this she adamant that people should not be in the classroom?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I just want to be clear: There was a pandemic, but it was through this government's inaction, through their poor decisions and their lack of actually investing in the education system, that students were out of the classroom for 27 weeks—the worst in the country.

I agree with the member for Essex: Everyone involved wants to be in the classrooms, including these education workers. But this government, rather than bargaining—because there are still bargaining dates available; these workers aren't on strike. You still have the opportunity to come back to the table. You didn't have to bring this in.

0820

But I have a question for the member from Essex: Do you think that it's acceptable for these workers in our region to have to go to the food bank to feed their families? Do you think that's acceptable?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to go back to the member from Windsor West and talk about one of those individuals who are speaking up. Her name is Carol Boulianne and here are her words, which are much better than mine: "I am disgusted and appalled by the Ford government's latest 'generous' offer—1.25% is still below the cost of living. I am tired of working for peanuts. What is wrong with you people? Get rid of the bill that caps government workers at 1%. I am sure Lecce and Ford would never accept a 1% wage freeze. And for them to legislate us back to work? I have not been able to buy new clothes for work in years. I barely have enough money for gas and food. I am tired of" bleeping "Ontarians with your \$250 cheque for parents. You" bleep "Ontarians before the election with your licence renewal fees that you were giving back. Shame, shame, shame on you both."

These are comments that I'm receiving, that all of you are receiving. This is the reality of what people are facing across Ontario.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The reality is that these workers that the government is now attacking went for three years with 0%—0%—and every year after that it's been below inflation. I don't think that any parent in this province, especially those whose children have developmental or intellectual disabilities and are supported by these workers, think that it is fair or reasonable for this government to keep these workers relying on food banks. They just don't.

I know that the government side of the House gets the same emails we do—people opposed to this. They pick and choose the emails they want to share. But the reality is, the government spin on this is not how the people in this province feel. It's not how the families feel. It's not how the kids feel.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Laura Smith: As a parent, I too have faced the same issues as other parents in this House. I have watched as my children have faced isolation and the challenges that have confronted them over the past two and a half years. It has not been pretty. I think we can all understand and respect that. What I'm saying right now as a mother of a son who is going to be, hopefully, in school on Friday is—

Interjections.

Ms. Laura Smith: What the opposition is saying, Madam Speaker, is that they're advocating for a strike. They're advocating for a strike. Shouldn't bargaining continue without beginning the strike countdown clock? Can the member answer that, please?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: There would be a response to that, but it would be considered unparliamentary. Even though they're allowed to say things that are not factual, we're not allowed to point that out.

At no point have any of us said that we're advocating for a strike. We're not—although we respect the workers' right to strike. We do. But you're not even to that point yet, and you've brought in this heavy-handed legislation.

Madam Speaker, I want to be clear: When my kids were in school, the Liberals brought in Bill 115. There were students and parents province-wide who staged walkouts in protest. I proudly stood with my daughter, who was one of those students, because the kids and the parents value the work that these education workers do, even if this Conservative government doesn't.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

MPP Jill Andrew: This piece of legislation that the Conservative government is putting forth will not keep students in classrooms. What it will do is hurt education workers. It will hurt students. It will hurt parents, quite frankly.

I am wondering why the government thinks it's okay for them to have a salary that allows them to buy a home, rent a home and have groceries for the month, and why education workers need to be at food banks. Why is this government allowing for education workers to do unpaid labour in a sector where they're leaving in droves because of the abuse they're facing?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: We're not allowed to speak to the motivation of others in the House, but what I can tell you is what it certainly looks like, which is, again, a largely woman-led workforce. Especially when you look at Bill 124, it certainly looks like there is some sort of issue when it comes to women in the workplace.

But I think it's also important to point out that it's not just about having kids in school; it's about having the staff there to actually support them, and to compensate them—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're out of time.

We're going to go to further debate.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Good morning, everyone. You know, I was leaving from Scarborough to come down and it was foggy. I remember my dad, who was a truck driver, would always get up very early. He used to say he got up

with the fog, and that's how I felt this morning, coming into this Legislature.

Why are we here? We're here to debate this bill. Bill 28 really feels as if we are having a conversation about—in fact, it really feels, when I listen to the minister's remarks, that we're having a constitutional debate about the right to collectively bargain. That's how I feel this morning.

Yet we know that this is a well-established right given to Canadians under the charter, which is part of Canada's Constitution, which is the supreme law of this land. Yet this government chooses to table legislation that negates those rights. With the stroke of a pen, 55,000 education workers no longer have the opportunity to exercise their right under the supreme law of Canada.

Madam Speaker, I received an email from Rose, a resident who says: "The right to free and fair collective bargaining is a fundamental freedom, protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is not a crime to fight for good jobs, decent wages, or a better life. I support the right to free and fair collective bargaining in Ontario."

Yet this government has tabled legislation pre-emptively. In fact, when I look at the explanatory note of this bill, which was obviously not drafted in haste—do you notice the size of this bill? I have seen many very thin and flimsy bills from this government, but not this one. It was deliberate.

In the first line of the explanatory note: "The act addresses the labour disputes involving school board employees represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees." What labour dispute? We were supposed to be in mediation today. We were supposed to be in mediation tomorrow and Thursday, yet the government—instead of showing up at the bargaining table, instead of doing its duty by negotiating with the representatives of 55,000 workers in this province—decided to pre-emptively table this legislation which is before this House today.

0830

I have received—and I'm sure others did, as well. This is from Chris, another resident. "As a proud veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, I expect my governments, at all levels, to act with honour and respect the charter. By denying citizens of this province basic freedoms that many have fought (and died) for, the provincial government is failing miserably in this fundamental requirement."

Madam Speaker, we are having this discussion and this debate because the government has put forward a draconian bill that overreaches with its authority and its power. And I am pretty sure that we haven't heard the end of this decision by the government to move forward with this bill. I think this is just the beginning, and it's unfortunate.

Nima, another resident in my constituency, writes to me often, and she offered some solutions for this government: "Pay workers better, guarantee increased services for students"—which is embedded in the negotiations that CUPE has put forward at the table. I know a lot of our conversation is about the wages, but there are many other improvements to our education system that have been put

forward for increasing services to students—“make significant investments into our schools, and ensure adequate staffing levels. Focus on building our schools, not issuing subtle threats to those who keep them working.”

Madam Speaker, it really breaks my heart when I see the consequences that this government has put forward over the heads of the 55,000 workers—our custodians who clean the floors and the washrooms and the classrooms, our EAs who help the most vulnerable students, our ECEs who work alongside the classroom teachers in our JK and SK full-day kindergarten classes.

I went into a junior kindergarten class just last month, and when the principal took me around to that classroom, he noted that many students are coming to school not as prepared—their social, emotional and even physical development is not what it was. The pandemic has taken its toll. In that class, there were six of our youngest learners who were not toiletied; they had to be taught. Who is responsible for teaching them that? Of course, that’s the fundamental responsibility of the parents and the home. But when they end up in the classroom, we don’t send them back. That is where those supports are—the ECEs are there, the EAs are there. And they were vigilant with those students. They were caring. They were compassionate. They were trained. And they showed up.

Yet our government has put forward a bill, Bill 28, with fines. If these workers decide to defy this legislation, should it pass, they will be subject to fines—\$4,000, each person. That adds up to \$250 million per day. That is what the government seeks to extract from the lowest-paid workers, who are largely female, if they stand up for their fundamental rights as Canadians—the right to collectively bargain, the right to have freedom of association and representation. It is their fundamental right, and if they stand up for their right that was hard fought for, they are subject to the draconian fine put forward in this legislation by this government. How does the government even anticipate that they will be—these people are struggling to put food on the table and keep a roof over their head. They are showing up every day, and this government is threatening to silence them with fines. And it says that if anyone supports them—it actually says that in this bill—they are also subject to that fine. And their representation from their bargaining units, which they are constitutionally able to participate in, they will be fined \$500,000. I think this government should be absolutely ashamed.

The other labour unions and the labour community are gathering in support of CUPE. They recognize that this is a slippery slope. If you do it to one, you could do it to others—you could do it to all of us. By invoking the “notwithstanding” clause in this instance, it diminishes the use of that clause for all Canadians. This is the second time that this government, should this pass, has utilized that here in Canada. It’s absolutely disgraceful.

I want to read you what Barb Dobrowolski said: “The Ford government’s decision to legislatively impose a contract on education workers and to invoke the ‘notwithstanding’ clause for the second time in Ontario’s history is another flagrant abuse of power.”

Even this gentlemen, Courtney—he’s not a member of a union and has never been one: “But I do recognize the role unions have in improving employees’ work lives. A lot of people forget that before unions, employers treated their employees terribly. Safety standards and a fair living wage were non-existent. It was the collective bargaining of employees that allowed a middle class to form in Canada and around the world. The wage and safety I enjoy is because of unions.

“I am a PC-voting citizen, but will not be voting for a political party that removes the rights of workers.”

It’s not too late, government members. You’re the majority in this House; we are the sober second thought. Doing this to these workers is not right. It is not right. You have three days that you could be at the table bargaining and doing your best effort to come to a deal. Instead, you’ve chosen to impose this legislation. It’s not right.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’ll go to questions.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend from Scarborough–Guildwood for her comments. I’m wondering if she’s getting the same kind of comments that I’m getting in my constituency office. I heard from Ella Marie from Welland in my riding, who said, “The minister should come work a week in each of our positions to see if it’s worth the pay we get, the abuse that EAs endure. Many of the EAs can’t make our meetings because they’re at a second job. If you’re a single person trying to find an apartment in Welland, you’re looking at \$1,600 to \$2,100 a month; I don’t even bring home \$2,400 a month. When you’re a single-income person, how do you expect someone to live off that?”

Are you hearing the same kind of comments from women in your riding?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Yes, I am hearing those comments. One of the things that I hear the government talk about all the time is that they have the best benefits in Canada and they’ve got all of these days of paid time off. Well, the people who work on a temporary or casual basis are not part of the benefits plan at all. Many of the workers are classified like that under the current structure, which is what the union representing them is trying to do: They’re trying to improve the working conditions for these employees.

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Absolutely, they work hard, but what I know is that when I visit schools, they have the biggest hearts for the students. They love their jobs, they love the students and they create a learning environment where our students can flourish, despite the fact that they are so low-paid. The fight that they’re pushing for is to lift all boats—is to improve the working conditions for these workers, which will in turn improve the learning environment for students.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’ll move to the next question.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I listened carefully to the submissions made by the member from Scarborough–Guildwood, and I try to listen very carefully to the statements that are made by members of this House. As I listened, I

remembered that the member from Scarborough–Guildwood actually used to be the Minister of Education in a government. That’s an important note because she was the Minister of Education in a government that closed 600 schools across the province of Ontario. That’s of particular interest to me because two of those schools, at least, and probably more, were in my riding of Essex. That government, of which the member was the Minister of Education, closed Western Secondary School, which was a heartbreaking experience.

So my question to the member is this: Will the member reverse the tradition of her party closing schools and keep the schools open like we want to do?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Madam Speaker, this is great. I was heckled on this and I heckled back. But it’s good to put it on record, because what the member from Essex should know is that, first of all, the Ontario Liberals are the party for education, and we opened 800 schools, either new or expanded schools—800; 800 were opened. One of my first announcements when I was very honoured to be asked to be the Minister of Education was to invest \$1.1 billion just in the care of keeping a refurbishment of schools. I urge this current government to keep up with that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I was listening carefully to the member’s comments. I do want to just start by saying that I think many of us certainly do look back on those previous government’s years and—I would say Bill 115 walked so Bill 28 could run. This has been the “set the table.” I know yesterday independent members of the Liberal Party did talk about their regrets. I wonder if you would reflect a little bit on how we got here and why this legislation is so particularly difficult and devastating for the education workers.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I was elected in 2013 and I became education minister in 2016. One of the things that came to my desk was the remedy that the judge had requested, that we negotiate with the labour unions. So it was my responsibility to convene a table that would begin to bring all parties together. Senator Tony Dean was someone I turned to for advice on how to work together to come up with a remedy. It took a while because we had to negotiate with each and every partner, but yes, mistakes were made, as John Fraser has said, and a remedy was done to resolve it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further questions?

Ms. Laura Smith: I also listened very intently to the member from Scarborough–Guildwood’s statement, and it’s interesting that the member referred to draconian policies. One time, when they were in power, they imposed incredibly draconian policies across numerous sectors, including education. They also froze salaries and required teachers and everyone else to take 12 unpaid days off a year.

Madam Speaker, I’m going to ask, why we should take that kind of interest in what they’re saying when they didn’t contribute at that time?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Well, I want to talk about the record of this government, because we’re now in five years here.

The Ford government failed Ontarians during the pandemic. We heard about the fact that you created unsafe spaces for schools, which led to 27 weeks of closure in our schools. Right now, you are sitting on \$2.1 billion in surplus, and yet you’re cutting \$1.6 billion out of the education system—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Your remarks through the Speaker, please.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: The FAO has pointed out that over five years you’re going to cut \$6 billion out of the education system and \$23 billion out of health care. Let’s talk about what you are doing right now.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Another question? The member for Niagara.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Niagara Falls.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Niagara Falls, indeed.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Niagara is a big area; mine is big enough.

Listen, I want to be clear here to my colleague: Women make up more than 70% of CUPE members in this bargaining unit and are more likely to be paid in a position with lower annual income than men.

We heard very passionately about living in poverty, going to work for 40 hours, but your government, under the Liberal government Bill 115, froze wages for four years. Why did the Liberal government legislate workers back to work under Bill 115, and do you regret being part of that government?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I just want to correct the member, because I was elected in 2013, so it was after Bill 115 was passed.

One of the things that we want to remember is that there was a strike and students were out of school and their education could have been at risk at that point because the strike was already under way. So there’s a distinct difference with the pre-emptive legislation that is before us today, as well as the ongoing legislation of Bill 124 that has really capped workers’ wages.

As you said, 70% of CUPE employees are women. Many of those affected by Bill 124 are women as well. I believe that this government seriously needs a gendered lens when it implements legislation so it knows the effects of its legislation on women.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have time for one last question.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Can we clarify from the member opposite the history lesson? The member opposite, I believe, was elected in a by-election of 2013 and in doing so offered herself as a candidate in support of a government that made the mistakes that she acknowledges.

She talks about responsibility. Can she not agree at least that we are being responsible and balanced in bringing these measures in, as a responsible government should be?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: This is not a responsible government. A responsible government would be at the bargaining table. You would not cancel days of negotiation so you can bring forward draconian legislation that invokes the “notwithstanding” clause, that diminishes the democracy of this country. It is not responsible at all.

It actually is very disheartening and is very concerning that you cannot govern without the utilization of the most significant, supreme piece of legislation that we have—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Before we go to further debate, I just want remind every member to make their comments through the Chair, please.

Further debate?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Speaker, I thank you for the valuable opportunity to stand in this House and address the assembly on this important day and to discuss the Keeping Students in Class Act, 2022.

I would like to begin by stating something which goes without saying: The COVID-19 pandemic brought about some of the most difficult times for many Ontarians, but especially for Ontario’s students. During these unprecedented times, many parents expressed struggles and frustrations about their children’s well-being. I know that many parents were challenged to balance the demands of what it meant to be a parent, which included finding a difficult work-life balance and ensuring their children’s mental health, academic and social progress would continue to develop.

While students displayed incredible resilience and flexibility, I also know that the pivot to full-time online learning came with its unique challenges for many Ontario students. For the last two years, remote learning played an important role in the delivery of education, but the pandemic also demonstrated its limitations.

It is time for students to continue their education in person, supported by many benefits only found in schools, all of which positively contribute to their academic, social and physical growth.

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As a parent and a long-time education champion advocating for parents and students in Ontario schools, I stand today to firmly express that our children must remain in class for the rest of the school year in a normal, stable learning environment. Therefore, any learning disruption in schools will not be tolerated by the government.

I recently ran into a mother who gave birth last year while two of her older kids were learning virtually. Everyone knows it’s a hard job being a parent. It comes with great responsibility and the balancing of competing challenges. The additional stress placed on parents and caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic caused many negative effects, including emotional and physical isolation that prohibited their children from cultivating essential skills that are necessary for their overall development.

As an immigrant from Jamaica who came to Ontario as a teenager, I also know how difficult the last two years

have been for newcomer parents and children. Moving into a new environment is challenging on its own merit, but, coupled with COVID-19, can intensify the isolation and desperation for community and resources.

I know of newcomer students and parents who moved to Ontario right before the COVID-19 lockdowns, and the pivot to remote learning was isolating and caused depression. For these newcomer students, this September is their very first time to be in school, learning, in Canada. During the last two years, they didn’t have many opportunities to get connected and to feel supported. Newcomer students have eagerly been waiting for the day they can make friends and join social clubs at their schools to better help themselves integrate and succeed in Ontario.

Speaker, the possibility of strikes is stealing the stability and normalcy newcomer students have been looking towards.

I would like to outline why our government is fighting so hard to keep students in class and why we will continue to support Ontario parents. I will elaborate further in the coming minutes, but to put it simply, we believe what is best for students is to be surrounded by available academic, mental and physical resources only accessible in schools.

Before I delve further into why students must remain in school for in-person learning right through to the month of June, I’d like to acknowledge and admire the inspiring resilience and flexibility many students displayed amid the learning disruptions caused by COVID-19. The strength students showed is nothing short of remarkable. Speaker, I would like to take this chance to appreciate and thank them, as they worked hard to mitigate the academic, social and economic implications of the pandemic. I’ve spoken to students who have talked about missing two years, of wanting to go back and relive, especially, the social pieces around graduations, proms and many after-school sports.

In my inaugural speech, I spoke of a high school student in Ajax whose entire high school career was marked by disruption, until this past September 2022. For the last two years, he’s longed for and dreamt about a return to a normal and stable school year. His dream is now being threatened once again.

I would like to ask everyone to imagine being a high school student without ever experiencing a normal and stable school year. Can you see why students want to remain in school for in-person learning, where they not only have access to academic supports but also ample opportunities to socialize and to learn from their peers?

Thanks to our government, under Premier Ford, the student I’m speaking of has now been given a glimpse of a normal, stable school year, and he wants to continue. But the possibility of learning disruptions is making him anxious. This emotional stress of once again not being in school will affect not only his studies but his overall well-being.

Various experts, such as the Children’s Health Coalition and the Chief Medical Officer of Health, have indicated that in-person learning is critical to a student’s ability to succeed academically.

Speaker, in-person learning also creates a stable learning environment for students to access additional physical and mental health supports. But it does so much more. Students are able to connect with their peers, which enhances their social skills. We have heard that there are students who are really struggling with this right now.

Our government has established many supports that students need to succeed in their studies. We have provided tangible supports and additional funding to schools to protect the safety of students, changed the curriculum to best fit our student population and future careers, and continued to support parents with direct financial support in uncertain economic times.

The most recent EQAO assessments showed a global decline in every subject except grade 6 reading. Grade 3 students experienced a four-point decline in reading, a seven-point decline in writing, and a small drop in math—Grade 6 students saw a further three-point. Grade 9 followed the same trend, with math scores dropping 23 points for English-language students and 25 points for French-language students. That is a real problem—and that’s even more profound for French-language students, who saw a 33% drop. Our government is committed to improving these scores.

Our government is investing in foundational learning supports in reading and math. To support learning recovery, \$25 million is being invested in evidence-based reading programs and professional assessments. We are placing a special emphasis on math recovery and literacy strategies, building on our government’s previous investments to ensure Ontario students have the support they need to succeed.

We are also looking to expand on previous investments for our four-year math strategy, investing \$50 million for the 2022-23 year to ensure students have the necessary supports they need to succeed and improve their math performance. Our government is going further by providing more digital math resources, accessible by students for additional review and practice. This includes elementary math course packs provided by TVO and TFO as well as the newly destreamed grade 9 math course.

We are continuing to modernize our curriculum to best reflect Ontario’s student population and their future careers. Ontario’s new math curriculum for grades 1 to 9 focuses on fundamental math skills, practical examples, and new mandatory learning on coding, data literacy and financial literacy.

Our government is establishing math leads in every school board as well as providing school-based math coaches. We believe in supporting teachers to do what they love to do, which is to educate Ontario students, so we are providing teacher-training initiatives that teachers have access to 24/7. Over 140 school-based math coaches in over 700 targeted schools will provide training directly to teachers in classrooms. To date, over 5,000 teachers have completed additional qualifications in math through these investments, and up to an additional 4,000 will be taking these qualifications this year. And the Ministry of Education will work directly with school boards through a

new math action team that will have expertise in promoting the use of high-impact math teaching practices in Ontario classrooms.

We believe in setting students up for success. This also means creating pathways for the skilled trades. Our government, under Premier Ford, will continue our focus on science, technology and math—STEM—education to build critical life and job skills so students can graduate with well-paying jobs. For the past four years, this government has placed a critical emphasis on STEM studies in our classrooms. These subjects contain not only the keys to many successful futures for our children, but they also represent areas of need in this province that will only grow with time. The success of Ontario’s future economy depends on the actions we take right now. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government is ensuring that students will now explore how science relates to careers in the skilled trades and how emerging and new technologies can impact these careers.

These new learning expectations within the curriculum will ensure Ontario students are at the forefront of emerging innovation and thought and able to compete in the global economy.

0900

Speaker, that is not all our government is doing to support student success. Additional resources are also available through the \$550.7-million Learning Opportunities Grant and other allocations within the Grants for Student Needs, GSNs, for the 2022-23 school year.

Summer learning opportunities were made available, including credit, upgrading and non-credit courses funded through the Grants for Student Needs, as well as summer learning programs, including expanded opportunities for targeted student populations.

To better support student resilience and mental well-being, our government stabilized the student mental health funding provided in 2021-22 by securing it in the 2022-23 Grants for Student Needs, and is providing an additional \$10 million to foster the continued learning and well-being of students. This represents an investment of over \$90 million in total funding for the 2022-23 school year to support student mental health in Ontario.

In addition, our government has invested \$304 million through the GSN for staffing supports, the hiring of teachers, early childhood educators and other education workers to address learning recovery, the implementation of the first year of fully destreamed grade 9 math, the delivery of remote learning and special-education supports, and the maintenance of enhanced cleaning standards.

Most recently, we are providing direct financial supports to parents through our catch-up payments. The catch-up payments are directly placed in the pockets of parents because we believe parents know what is most needed to support their children. All students in kindergarten to grade 12 will receive a payment of \$200, while students with special needs will receive a payment of \$250.

Speaker, our government is one that cares and believes that investing in Ontario students is important. So far, over 800,000 parents have submitted their application to

receive direct payments that enable them to fill their child's education needs as they see fit. The availability of catch-up payments is putting more money back into Ajax parents' pockets and helping students overcome learning gaps created during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have provided the largest investment in learning supports in the country, with over \$175 million provided to boards to enhance in-school tutoring programs.

Previously, our government developed three unprecedented family support payment programs. Through the COVID-19 child benefit, we provided relief to over two million children with well over \$800 million. Through Support for Families, we provided supports to families with more than \$320 million. We also provided over \$400 million through Support for Learners to help families face new education-related expenses.

Speaker, we have invested in Ontario students to mitigate the learning losses caused by the pandemic. Our government's unwavering commitment to keep kids in school is also supported by many families. Parents and students would like to restore some balance in their lives, and they welcome additional supports from our government.

In the last month, I've met students and parents and listened to their concerns and heard their academic hopes and dreams. Many parents have mentioned that their children are losing soft skills that are crucial to their well-being and success in life. The one word I kept hearing repeatedly that challenged students' hopes of achieving academic excellence was the word "uncertainty"—the words of missing out, the words of being labelled "the COVID generation." They were uncertain if schools will remain open for in-person learning. Students are worried that they will not be able to see their friends and that they will be isolated again. The possibility of a strike brought forward by CUPE is increasing their anxiety and stress levels.

I'd like to highlight the total number of strike days that unions have imposed on Ontarian students and parents: between the years 1989 to 2020, that's 2,224 strike days—I'd like to point out that 1,031 of those days were under the nose of the previous NDP government—with more than a million staff members who walked away from their jobs and imposed uncertainty on Ontario families. The impacts on students and parents were severe on many occasions, with classroom disruptions, financial challenges to find proper daycare, and the emotional and mental struggle of having to reconfigure their work schedule to match the needs of their children.

Despite our government's best efforts and students hoping to remain in class for in-person learning, the NDP and Liberal members claim that supporting parents is irresponsible of our government. They're asking why we're providing direct financial supports to families when our government has already provided tutoring supports for in-class tutoring.

Why is the NDP fighting to disrupt students' opportunity to succeed in a safe environment that not only allows

them to thrive academically but also supports their mental and physical well-being?

The opposition would like us to take the money we dedicated to parents and supply it elsewhere. They're adamant that politicians like themselves know better than a parent of a child.

Here's my answer: Yes, we have provided additional funding to school boards. And yes, we have ensured schools are well equipped with what is necessary to keep our kids in school safely for in-person learning. And, yes, students can access tutoring supports through their school board. Online tutoring programs enable students to receive one-on-one supports from certified teachers, both through Mathify and Eureka!

I will repeat what I've said already: Many parents have spoken up and expressed that lockdowns have been especially difficult for their kids. Lockdowns have really impacted their social connections. Parents are talking about students being connected to their devices and not being social and not connecting with their peers.

Speaker, our government has recognized and demonstrated the additional support students need to make in-person learning our best option. We provided additional funding to school boards to hire more staff and invest in their infrastructure so students can access quality education in person with their peers.

Keeping kids in school is also supporting families. Our government is providing choice and flexibility to families to meet the needs of their students directly and to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 disruption. It is important for us to address these needs in a timely manner, and providing direct support will ensure tailored supports for each child.

The additional supports our government is providing are to ensure our education ecosystem continues to benefit Ontario students. Students are able to best utilize these resources if they remain in school for in-person learning from September right into the month of June. Parents and students alike are looking to be relieved from the limitations of online learning.

As I come to the end of my speech, I would like to ask the opposition, why are they so opposed to providing relief to families? Or is their position, as the opposition, to oppose everything our government is trying to accomplish by supporting Ontario's parents, students and caregivers? Lastly, why does CUPE insist on disrupting in-person learning and contributing to student loss?

As I stated at the start of my remarks, over the last two years the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the delivery of education in Ontario and students' achievement has been greatly impacted.

The Minister of Education stated, "It could not be clearer that we must keep students in class without disruption, with a focus on ... reading, writing and math—after two years of pandemic-related learning disruptions."

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll now go to questions.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the member opposite: "The act is declared to operate notwithstanding sections 2, 7 and 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and

Freedoms and the act will apply despite the Human Rights Code.”

I have stood in this House many times on the 11th day of November. It is November 1; we have 11 days to remember.

I brag about my son Petty Officer Jonathan Lindal, currently posted to the Naval Fleet School Atlantic as the senior combat information instructor teaching today’s naval tactics and doctrines to the future of the fleet. Over the past 18 years, he served on Her Majesty’s Canadian Ship for multiple overseas deployments.

0910

My question to you is, will you honour and respect the Charter of Rights that my son, my grandfather, my great-grandfather fought for—to the 55,000 workers in CUPE. Will you respect that?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I respect every person who serves because everybody gives back—a sacrifice for themselves.

What I will not say is, the Premier—we have been crystal clear to parents. Parents are frustrated. Children are impacted. Children need to be in class. They are suffering from—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Stop the clock.

If we agreed to listen to each other, that would be appreciated.

Next question.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you for my colleague’s wonderful speech.

Speaker, over the past decades, especially through the last two to three years, more of the same unions have been disrupting, along with the pandemic, and have kept kids out of the classroom, without their report cards and all the extracurricular activities they need and want, including sports—and their class. Now CUPE wants to extend this hardship by imposing a strike, starting on Friday, unless the Ontario taxpayers agree with their unaffordable demands for a nearly 50% increase in compensation.

My question is simple: Why is this Bill 28 so important for Ontario parents and students?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you for that question.

Parents are frustrated. Students have been out of school for two years. We have heard all the data around mental health, we have heard all the data about social skills—and it’s important. We asked CUPE to rescind their plan to strike so that we would continue to negotiate, but they did not.

This legislation is important so we can keep students in school.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: What my friend opposite has proven to me is something that has disturbed me in the last four years working in this place. Unbeknownst to the people of Ontario, a gravy train has pulled up to this building and it has been helping members of this government and not the workers of Ontario.

I want to talk about the 43 government MPPs who got a \$16,000 pay increase last July. That’s \$132,000 a year they’re making, while constituents like Lisbeth Slabotsky write me to say, “The right to free and fair collective bargaining is a fundamental freedom protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.” It is not good enough for workers of this province—but it’s great to ride the gravy train if you’re a member of the Ford government.

How do you feel riding on that gravy train, member?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I appreciate the impassioned speech of the member across the way.

“The gravy train has rolled up”—you’re selling the story that we got a raise. It’s the same thing that you guys do—we all get the same. If you were on a committee, you would have gotten the same. If you were a parliamentary assistant, you would have gotten the same. It wasn’t a raise. We all know—both sides—that we’ve been frozen since 2014.

Let’s get back to the fact that students need to be in class—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Order. Order.

Stop the clock, please. Thank you.

Again, I will remind the members of two things. You need to address your comments to the Chair, whether it be your answer or your questions. And please keep the noise down so that we can hear each other. Thank you.

I’ll go to the next question.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is this: Could you describe the harm of a strike on our most vulnerable students right now—those requiring special education?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: We need to keep our students in school. COVID-19 has been very hard on students. We keep discussing workers, and workers are very important, and I would never say that I do not appreciate everything that workers do in our schools. But students are impacted. It has been two years. And if we’re not willing to stand up for our students, then who will?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I’m glad to be able to address some comments to the member from Ajax. We both have the opportunity to represent Durham region, and I know that she comes from education, as a former trustee.

While she talked about learning experience in our schools, I would say that I don’t believe that this government does care about the learning experience of students or their mental health. When I’m standing here holding a bill that says it has declared to operate despite the Human Rights Code or the “notwithstanding” section of the Canadian Charter of Rights—I want to know which rights are the most important in this province, because these are rights. Collective bargaining is a right. The right to strike is a right. And this runs over those rights.

These are education workers fighting for improved working conditions. Their working conditions, which are increasingly violent and upsetting—which I know that this

member has heard directly—are the learning conditions of students.

So why can't we invest in education and support these education workers? And why the heck are we stripping away their human rights with this piece of legislation?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: This government has continued to invest in education. We know that, and the members from NDP know that. There will always be competing rights. That's the reality that we live in. And in this case, we are standing up for the right of students to be in school 24/7 with extracurriculars.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Markham–Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you to the member from Ajax for her presentation.

Our government is committed to keeping students in class.

Can the member share with the House how this bill can help us keep students in class?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: We have been negotiating since August. We asked the union on Sunday to rescind their plan to strike so that we could continue to negotiate. They refused to pull the plan to strike on Friday, and so we need to have this bill in place so students can stay in school.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to ask the member—she was a trustee; she has come from the education system—if special education, as she mentioned, is so important and it harms the most vulnerable students to not have these educators in our classrooms, why are you harming vulnerable students by forcing their support system out of the workforce? You're forcing these education workers, who are paid so poorly that they're driven out of the province or they're driven to other jobs, to find enough to make a good living.

I actually got a message this morning from one worker who told me that she slept in her car between shifts at school and her other job because they cannot make enough and do the jobs that they need to do.

These are the people you're hurting. These are the people you're driving out of their jobs. And as a result, what happens? The vulnerable students are the ones who are getting harmed. How do you justify that?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: CUPE is planning to strike, and if they're planning to strike—students are not in class. If they're planning to strike, those most vulnerable who you're talking about will not be serviced—if they walk out, they will not.

We have additional students who are suffering from social and mental challenges from the pandemic.

I appreciate and understand that our education workers are being paid—we are offering a reasonable deal. We are ensuring the stability for students and parents through a four-year contract. We're enabling the refocus of the education system on learning loss, mental health and physical health. We're increasing CUPE education worker salaries by 2.5%. We are increasing education workers'

pension and benefits contributions by \$6,120 annually. We're continuing to strengthen the integrity of—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We're out of time.

We're going to go to further debate.

0920

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from London West and the member from Niagara Falls.

There have been a lot of interesting comments on what happened at the negotiations table, beginning with the Minister of Education's academy performance earlier this morning.

Yesterday, Kory Teneycke, the Conservative strategist, was on CBC's Power and Politics. He warned teachers that the government is ready to legislate them back to work like it has with CUPE education workers. He went on to say, "You can take that to the bank. Because it's going to happen." That's how this government negotiates—not in good faith.

And the rhetoric from this Minister of Education and the rhetoric from the Premier himself on the relationship and the negotiations with education workers has been so demoralizing for the very people who are in that sector.

I want to give the other side of the story. There was an interview yesterday with Laura Walton, the president of OSBCU. This is the other side:

"Laura Walton had insisted just minutes prior that a negotiated deal was still possible before Friday.

"Negotiations aren't done," said Walton. "This is a piece of legislation that was just proposed. It hasn't been passed. It's just a piece of paper that has been received at Queen's Park."

"Walton also told reporters the union was planning to make concessions on its wage increase demands and present that counter-offer to the province today"—but this is what happened.

"We are working on it today," said Walton in response to a question from Queen's Park Today. "We are going to be moving down, but we're not moving to where" they want us to go, which is five cents every hour. That was the five-cents-per-hour increase. They're asking for a 33-cents-per-hour increase—I don't know where the government members are getting a 50% increase in the contractual agreements. Get away from your speaking notes.

"When asked if the government would refuse to hear the union's new offer, Lecce said he wasn't aware....

"They had an opportunity to present to the government a counter-proposal they may or may not introduce'....

"The meeting on Sunday was held at the province's request. According to Walton, the union received the request to meet early in the morning but didn't realize until the afternoon that the government wanted to present a new offer." They had trouble pulling everybody together.

"Walton said the province's negotiators told her side to either take it or leave it.

"When we got there, we were informed that this would be legislated. That is not bargaining. That is an ultimatum," said Walton. "What they did is give us a piece

of legislation that gives an extra nickel to workers ... and they walked away'....

"The Canadian Civil Liberties Association condemned the PC's use of the notwithstanding clause in Bill 28, saying it was never meant to be used as a tool in contract negotiations." These are facts.

"This misuse, and the flagrant disregard for individual rights is wrong and it is dangerous to our constitutional democracy'...." That is true.

"Soon after Bill 28 was tabled in the Legislature," ETFO, in solidarity with CUPE, walked out as well.

So this is all very premeditated. This government and this Minister of Education never really wanted a deal with CUPE.

I want to just tell the members of the government side how demoralizing this is for the people who spend every day with kids.

This is from a Waterloo Region District School Board secondary school teacher. He said, "In the private sector, if you had a director that utterly destroyed the morale of all their employees, they would be fired, period, because it's bad for business." That's what the education minister has done, but the Conservatives give the education minister a standing ovation?

And to see the Minister of Labour get a standing ovation on a piece of legislation which tramples worker rights—I've never seen that kind of—I don't even have words for it. It's as low as you can go. The role of the Minister of Labour is to uphold the rights of workers and not trample them.

This educator went on to say, "If the goal this time around is not just to create a crisis in public education, like Mr. Harris did, but to dismantle it by targeting the very people that make it work, if the minister's goal is to destroy public education in favour of his beloved private schools, then I guess that's why his colleagues are clapping." That's what educators are coming at us with.

"History has taught us that all evil starts with small steps. This legislation will be remembered as a major leap towards dismantling a public education system that has served this province so well for so many decades, and when that happens, the clapping will stop, just as it has for so many dictators throughout history."

So this is from people who are watching what is happening here in this House, and the lack of transparency is truly upsetting.

I wrote to the Premier yesterday and I said, "Without transparency, it's impossible to show that there's accountability. And without knowing there's accountability, there can be no trust."

We need to see the mandate letters from this government. When the privacy commissioner told you to release the mandate letters, which they have done, you appealed to the Divisional Court. And when the Divisional Court told you to release the mandate letters, you went to the Ontario Court of Appeal. And when the Court of Appeal told you the same thing, you appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada, where the case is still pending, four years after the initial freedom-of-information ask. The mandate

letters will obviously shed some light on what the true motivation of the government is.

But actions speak louder than anything, and what we have seen from this government is an intentional and mindful undermining of public education—and by this piece of legislation, what a dangerous road we're going down.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I just want to ask a question to all my colleagues: Who's on strike today?

Interjection: Nobody.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Nobody. Nobody is on strike today.

I want to tell my colleagues across the row, who are reading the paper and playing with their phones and doing everything else but listening, that 98% of every collective agreement in the province of Ontario is settled without a strike.

I think CUPE is at the Sheraton right now, and they're saying to this government, "Come and bargain with us."

My colleague talked a little bit about collective bargaining earlier this morning, and he said, because he has bargained, "I've done 150 collective agreements, and most are done in the last few hours, quite frankly. That's when the movement starts."

You guys don't care, because what this is about—it isn't about the kids, and if anybody thinks it is, they're wrong. This is about busting the unions. It started with Bill 124, when you attacked their collective agreements, when you made sure they couldn't take vacation and they couldn't use seniority. That's what this is about.

You guys were all happy you had a surplus—\$2.1 billion, announced last week. Why didn't you take that surplus and put it into education? Why didn't you put it into wages? Why didn't you put it into health care? Why didn't you put it into long-term care, when 5,000 of our seniors have died in long-term care? Why didn't you take that \$2.1 billion and put it where it needs to go and get back to the bargaining table and take care of these workers?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Comments through the Chair, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The Minister of Labour—my colleague talked about it—tonight he was the first one who clapped, the first one who stood up, as a Minister of Labour.

Do you know why we're so passionate over here? Do you know why the member from Sudbury was passionate about it? He grew up in poverty, and so did Wayne Gates. We don't think anybody should live in poverty in the richest province in Canada, Ontario.

Our food banks are overflowing with workers who are working full-time jobs, working two and three jobs when housing prices are through the roof, gas is through the roof, food is through the roof and—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Can you stop the clock, please?

I'm sorry; I'm going to interrupt the member. I'm going to insist that you make your comments through the Chair and not across the aisle, please, if that's possible.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I apologize, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Nobody—no worker, no education worker, no CUPE member—should have to go to work for 40 hours a week and their first stop when they get paid is the food bank. What are we doing?

I want to finish up about the minister. It's disgraceful that he stood up. When he stands in this House over and over again and says they're working for workers—do you think this is working for workers?

Interjections: Yes.

0930

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's the problem over there: You actually think it is. But do you know what the minister has tonight? Do you know what he has tonight, through the Chair? There is a rally tonight of CUPE workers, sponsored by the Ontario federation, which represents one million workers who you never talked to once on this bill—not once. You never give them a heads-up on what you're trying to do.

But do you know where the minister is going to be? He's going to be right beside the rally. He's not going to be at the rally, by the way, like you'd think the Minister of Labour would be. Do you know where he's going to be? He's got a \$1,000-a-plate dinner tonight, when he's standing up applauding that they're attacking workers—\$1,000 a plate.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Order, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you know what? Just yesterday, when you guys brought the bill out, pages and pages of workers—CUPE workers, EAs talking about the violence in their schools, educational assistants—somebody told me they've had a 31-cent raise in the last 14 years. All we're saying to you is that we don't believe anybody—I've been at work my whole life; some of you guys should try that. I've been a worker my entire life, and I never once said to the union, "I want to go on strike." What I said to them is, "I expect you to go to the bargaining table and bargain a fair collective agreement with the employer," and in this case it's the government.

That's what I wanted, and do you know what? Every single one of those CUPE workers—do you know what they want? They want a fair collective agreement, a negotiated collective agreement. I'm encouraging this government to get back to the bargaining table, to get to the Sheraton. CUPE is waiting for you. Don't bring in a bill that's a hundred pages, because what that tells me, through the Speaker, is that it's very clear what they were thinking. This was planned, because it's an attack against the union. It's an attack against workers in the province of Ontario.

Do you know what workers should do in this province? I'm going to say it: We need to come together as workers

and say to this government that if you take on one worker in the province of Ontario, then you're going to take us all on, because an injury to one is an injury to all. Thank you very much—and come to your senses at some point in time.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today to join the debate on Bill 28, legislation that follows a long line of anti-worker bills that this government has brought forward. We saw that in their first term of office, when they introduced Bill 124, when they did a complete override of collective agreements with the emergency orders, so in some ways this legislation is not all that surprising.

What is concerning, however, about Bill 28 compared to those previous acts of this government, is its unprecedented use of the "notwithstanding" clause and the override of the human rights protections that are included in the Human Rights Code. This is the first use in Canada of the "notwithstanding" clause to suppress constitutionally protected charter rights. The courts have been very clear that freedom of association includes the right to fair and free collective bargaining, as well as the right to strike. This government removes those constitutionally protected charter rights and will engage this government for years in court fights about the government's use of these provisions.

Just last week in this place, we eulogized Bill Davis, who was a part of the group who repatriated the Constitution. Bill Davis brokered the deal that brought us the "notwithstanding" clause, and he was very, very clear that it was to be used very, very sparingly, and it was to be used to provide new benefits for disadvantaged or marginalized populations, not to use the heavy sledgehammer of legislation during collective bargaining.

As my other colleagues have mentioned, it is clear that this bill took some time for the government to write. This was not a bill that came off a word processor in a couple of days. They have been working on this bill for months—for months, Speaker—as CUPE members have been sitting at the table waiting for the government to negotiate in good faith.

And who are these CUPE workers? They are education assistants; they are early childhood educators; they are custodians; they are school secretaries. They are the backbone of our education system and they are the lowest-paid workers in our education system, and so low paid, in fact, Speaker, that many are relying on food banks, as we have pointed out time after time. There was a survey that CUPE undertook of its members which found that half of CUPE members struggle to pay their bills each month. The paycheque won't cover basic necessities of food, of utilities, of transportation. They're not getting a sufficient salary to meet those financial obligations that they have to feed their families and maintain some semblance of a quality of life. One quarter of CUPE members said they couldn't afford gas or public transportation on the wages that they were being paid. More than two thirds of CUPE members said they had to stop setting aside money for

savings because there was no money to put aside at the end of the month.

So these are not workers who are being well compensated and are asking for unreasonable wage increases. They are workers who are asking to be paid what they are worth. And we saw during the pandemic how very crucial these workers are to the health and safety, to the academic success, to the well-being of children in this province. Do children matter to this government? Does it matter to this government that there are caring adults in our school system who are able to support kids in schools?

This government talks about the fact that they want to bring stability and end disruption in our school system, but if they watched what happened after Bill 115 under the Liberals, when a collective agreement was imposed on education workers, the aftermath of that legislative action lasted years, Speaker. I was one of those trustees who was there at the time of Bill 115. I saw the complete demoralization of education workers across the education system. I saw parent frustration higher than it had ever been because of the dismal atmosphere in our schools. We saw students who were losing opportunities that they needed to engage in education and be successful and go on. That is the legacy that this government is going to be bringing to public education with this action.

There is speculation that maybe this is all part of the government's plan to privatize more and more of our public services, and that the direct payments to parents that have been flowing out during this pandemic and the \$345-million catch-up payments to parents is all part of a backhand way of privatizing public services. The government says that parents should be trying to chase down tutors to help their kids in school, but parents are saying that they know that what will help kids in school is having early childhood educators; it's having educational assistants; it's having custodians; it's having school secretaries who are compensated appropriately and there to support their kids.

I just wanted to read a couple of emails that I have received from parents. One parent wrote to me, "The lack of support for educational staff is callous and unforgivable. I have two primary school-aged children and frankly no amount of mental health support can prepare us for yet another year of disruptions and virtual school. The kids need to be in school, and educational staff need to be adequately compensated."

Another parent, with two elementary school-aged children, says, "If a strike is necessary for these workers to be treated fairly their right to strike should absolutely not be taken away! Our children have had a lot of disruptions these last few years but we cannot agree with the idea of the government taking away the right to strike. It shows us that the government is not working to bargain in good faith."

0940

I implore this government—there are several days left before November 4—withdraw this bill, get back to the bargaining table, talk to CUPE workers, negotiate a fair deal, give our kids the supports that they need in our

classrooms and help preserve quality public education in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll now go to questions.

Mr. Will Bouma: If there has been one thing that has become abundantly clear over the hours of debate—almost five as of right now—it's that every provincial government does its battles with education unions, period. If we go back in time to when the opposition was in power in the 1990s, they actually put across a bill that left everyone at zero, froze salaries and required teachers and everyone else to take 12 unpaid days off a year.

When the independent Liberals were in power, most recently in 2012—and the NDP held the balance of power, even though they may not have supported Bill 115—education workers saw a 0% increase.

My question to the member from London West: Is a 2.5% increase—10% over four years—a better deal than what the opposition parties have offered?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the question. I think that all of us on this side of the House have been very clear that workers deserve to be fairly compensated and they deserve to bargain the compensation that they're going to receive at a bargaining table through fair and free collective negotiations. This government has decided to invoke an imposed contract on these workers rather than sitting down in good faith to talk about what kind of a deal will compensate them fairly and preserve the supports that our children receive in Ontario classrooms.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Parkdale–High Park for the next question.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to thank my colleagues for their excellent presentation, and painting a very clear picture of the impact of Bill 28 on everyone, but, most importantly, on students and families. I've heard from many constituents in the last couple of days really expressing their concern. These are parents, family members, people with kids in their schools, who understand that this legislation is going to hurt everybody. One constituent wrote to me saying that "Using the 'notwithstanding' clause to keep people in poverty in a climate of record inflation is an affront to the principle of democracy and basic human decency."

I'd like to ask the member from Niagara Falls what he is hearing from his constituents, parents of children in schools.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I really do appreciate that question. My phone was ringing off the hook. We got lots of texts the last two days. I'm going to read one—I brought a lot of these examples here, but I only had six minutes to talk and not 20, so I couldn't use them: "A caretaker at the board for 14 years, I've barely seen my wages increase—only a 31-cent increase an hour over the past 14 years." She currently makes under \$39,000 a year. She told our office that if she didn't have additional income supports right now she'd be forced to go to the food bank, something she knows some of her colleagues have to do every week. The working conditions are similar in her case as right across the board.

I thank you for that question, but there are cases and cases and cases like that being called to everybody's office. I'd be surprised if they're not calling your offices as well. You guys might not answer the phone or emails, but they are definitely calling—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. Next question?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: This question is for the member for London West. I wonder if the member opposite is interested in facts such as that education workers in Ontario are the highest paid in the country, that CUPE custodial staff earn more than their equivalents in a hospital would and they collect the most generous pension and benefits in the nation, that their wages are comparable or above others in the private sector, and that while CUPE continues to claim that the average education worker makes \$39,000 per year, what they fail to mention is that that stat includes part-time workers. Is this member interested in facts? That is my question, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for London West to respond, and I'll ask members to order, please.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker. I will remind the member of the facts that I included in my presentation. Half of CUPE members struggle to pay their bills each month. One quarter of CUPE members can't afford gas or public transportation. More than two thirds of CUPE members have had to stop setting aside money for savings because there is no money left at the end of the month. Those are the facts. CUPE members are relying on food banks in order to feed their families. Those are facts. Just ask my colleague the member for Sudbury, who has been raising this issue during question period.

Our education workers provide a vital, essential service in this province. They deserve to be fairly and adequately compensated for that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is to the member for Waterloo. Last month, the Minister of Finance actually announced that the Ontario government ended the fiscal year with a \$2.1-billion surplus, a far cry from the \$33-billion deficit that was projected. Following shortly afterwards on October 27, the FAO then criticized the Conservative government for not being transparent of how they were going to spend the money over the next several years. Then they revealed that there's a \$44-billion unallocated contingency fund and about \$40 billion in programs unspent. The FAO says the contingencies are not generally used to address these shortfalls.

My question, Speaker, to the member is: If the provincial cupboards are bare, as claimed by the Ford Conservative government, why are they misleading Ontarians with the austerity budget and punishing education workers with legislated poverty by taking away their collective bargaining rights and disrupting human rights?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw the unparliamentary comment.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): And I'll ask the member for Waterloo to respond.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much for the question—very timely. Clearly the money is there, which is why we have called into question the motivation of this government with regard to Bill 28. There is no need to bring forward this piece of legislation, which has obviously been in the works for months now, because you just don't pull a piece of legislation out of thin air like this.

And it's very true: The FAO, an independent officer of the Legislature, has said that the government will have run a surplus of \$25.3 billion over the next six years, that there is an unallocated contingency fund of \$44 billion. This is money that the government did not spend on keeping classrooms safe during the pandemic. This is federal transfer money that the government squirrelled away.

I was actually asked this question last week. I want to say to the government, that money needs to go to public services. There is no reason for this standoff to be happening with education workers—or health care workers, for that matter. You need to repeal Bill 124 and pay the people who do public services in this province adequate salaries and show them some damned respect.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the submissions by the member from London West, and it was very, very, very clear that the member is willing to entertain the possibility of a strike and a close-down of schools. It's very clear. We've enunciated on this side of the House that we will not entertain a disruption to the children's learning. We've made that very clear. So the positions are very clear. They're very diametrically opposed: one side, the opposition, being willing to entertain the possibility of closing down the schools, and the government not willing to entertain that possibility.

The member from Ajax pointed out that there are many vulnerable students who will suffer if the schools are closed down, students who have missed out on learning and students who, in her words, don't want to be subject to uncertainty or missing out.

My question is as follows: Will the opposition join us in protecting those vulnerable students?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The member for Waterloo to respond.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Essex just said something really interesting. He claims that they want to prevent a disruption. I would counter by saying that you've created the disruption in our education system. It is your government that ramped up the rhetoric against the workers in Ontario, that has clearly not come to the table with a fair bargaining offer. And this is another thing that your government hasn't done: You're gutting job-security language, giving boards greater ability to cut jobs. There's no new funding for additional staffing—which counters

the rhetoric we heard today. There's no guarantee of designated early childhood educators in every kindergarten classroom. And finally, massive cuts to sick leave and short-term disability—after everything that we have learned through this pandemic, this government is going after sick days for vulnerable students.

Shame on all of you.

0950

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to participate in the debate on Bill 28, a bill that takes a chainsaw to the charter rights of education workers.

To quote the CCLA: “The notwithstanding clause was never meant to be used in contract negotiations, or as a casual tool to disrupt basic human rights safeguarded in our charter. This misuse, and the flagrant disregard for individual rights is wrong.”

But here we are with a government trampling on charter rights instead of negotiating in good faith.

The sad situation is, this negatively affects our children, because students lose when the Ford government doesn't care about the people who care for our children; who get up every morning and make sure our schools are open, clean and safe; who provide support for children with special needs and create a stable learning environment for all students. These education workers do extraordinary work under very difficult conditions. But it's hard to do that work as well as they can because many of these workers are struggling so much in their day-to-day lives to pay the rent and put food on the table, because they are doing it on salaries averaging \$39,000 a year.

Speaker, half of these workers have to work a second job just to make ends meet. Many of them are going to food banks to put food on the table. They are simply asking for an extra \$3 an hour to be able to do their jobs and pay the bills.

So I want to speak directly to parents and students. I want schools to be open. Education workers want schools to be open. And if we want those open schools to be safe, clean and full of fairly paid workers who can and will focus on student support and success—that will not happen with a government attacking education workers and forcing them to work for wages that don't pay the bills.

We are experiencing, right now, the tragic results of disrespecting front-line workers and underpaying front-line workers in our collapsing health care system. We cannot allow the Ford government do that to our education system.

So I say to the members opposite: Roll up your sleeves and get to work. Do your job. Bargain fairly. Reach an agreement that puts our students first and keeps our schools open by ensuring that the people who care for them are paid a fair wage.

If they don't do that—that is why I'm voting against Bill 28.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to questions.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: To the member from Guelph, thank you for your comments.

I've heard a lot of concern about the mental health of students, but I'm wondering if the member from Guelph would like to speak to the mental health of the workers. I wonder about what their mental health will be like when they have their human rights overridden, when they have their charter rights overridden, when they are taking second and third jobs to survive, when they are accessing food banks, when they don't have the money to look after their own children. I wonder what kind of mental health we can expect from them when they are working with the most vulnerable of our students.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. In the question, the member highlighted the many stresses that educational assistants and education workers are facing. But I want to tell you one thing that they're also facing: They're facing increasing levels of violence in the classroom, which is having a direct negative effect on those workers' mental health and on the quality of education our students are experiencing. Why is that happening? Because we have a shortage of education assistants? Why do we have a shortage of education assistants? Because the government is underfunding our schools and it's becoming increasingly difficult to recruit workers in jobs that don't pay a living wage.

Speaker, if we want to address the mental health needs of both students and education workers, let's pay education workers a fair wage so they can pay the bills and serve our students at the same time.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the opportunity to interact with the member from Guelph. His party hasn't gone through the stresses of having to govern and having these battles with the education unions, so I was wondering if he might be able to offer us his insights on this matter.

When the NDP was in power, they legislated 0%. When the Liberals were in power, they legislated 0%. We are giving the lowest-paid education workers a 10% raise over four years. Is that a better deal than what the other parties have given?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. There are no heroes when it comes to this issue.

Here's the bottom line, Speaker: No government in Canadian history has used the “notwithstanding” clause to take away the bargaining rights of education workers. The “notwithstanding” clause—that is something this government is going to have to live with. That's why I'm saying to negotiate. These workers deserve a fair deal. If we want our students to work in a supportive environment that puts students first, we need to put the education workers who care for and support those students first as well.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Guelph. The Conservative government, all morning now, for five hours, as the colleague had said, has been saying that there's no way to stop a strike unless they mandatorily take away their collective bargaining rights and force them to continue using food banks.

Do you believe there's any way that we can negotiate a way to keep schools open and elevate the wages of these workers so they aren't going to food banks?

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

There are many examples—as a matter of fact, I believe some members have cited the fact that 98% of negotiations at the table reach a bargain that both sides can live with.

Speaker, if we're really going to put students first—and I know there are so many parents out there right now who are concerned about schools staying open, who are concerned about the learning gaps their students have experienced during the pandemic—the best way we can create an open, stable and successful learning environment for students is to actually pay education workers a living wage so that they don't have to go to food banks, so they can actually pay the rent and pay the bills. That's the decent and right thing to do.

Any of us who say we're going to put students first—then we have to pay those workers fairly so they can care for our students and create the stable, successful learning environment that our students need and deserve. That is why I'm voting against Bill 28. That's why it's wrong.

Get to the table and negotiate an agreement that's fair to both sides. That's what's good for students.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to further debate.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I rise in this chamber to voice my full support for our government's plan to catch up and for the actions we are taking to ensure our province's children can enjoy a normal school year.

I speak to you not only as a minister and as an MPP but also as a mother. My children have always been blessed with amazing education workers in their schools.

But why we're here today is to ensure that children are staying in school.

For the first time in two years, children are back in their classrooms and they're experiencing an academic year expected to be free of disruptions.

Ontario schools are safe for in-person learning, thanks in part to the over \$3.2 billion in COVID-19 resources we provided to school boards since the start of the pandemic and the major improvements we have made to air quality and ventilation in schools in every corner of the province.

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Hard-working parents in Simcoe North have made their expectations clear. They want their kids in school and learning alongside their peers right up until the academic end of year in June.

I was speaking to Kim last evening, a grandmother, and she was explaining how important it is for her grandson to stay in school. She also commented that this has been going on since the times when her daughter was in school. Students need to be in the classroom.

I believe that Simcoe North families, and indeed all families across Ontario, deserve a normal school year after two years of pandemic-related disruptions.

Today, Madam Speaker, Ontario students are back in the classrooms where they belong. The 2022-23 academic year is two months' old and is going very well so far.

Moreover, students are benefiting from the full school experience, including sports, band, field trips and after-school extracurricular clubs and activities.

The purpose of education is, of course, to prepare our young people for the jobs of tomorrow, but school is also about spending time with friends, sharing a laugh or two and, of course, achieving personal goals. Those goals might include displaying excellence on the football field, mastering an unfamiliar song, captivating an audience by acting in the school play, or raising money for a worthwhile community cause.

Madam Speaker, I hope that everyone in this chamber can agree that in-person learning is essential for the mental and physical health, as well as the overall well-being, of Ontario students.

It is true the pandemic demonstrated the usefulness of online or remote learning, and I definitely saw that in my own ministry. Remote learning certainly has a role to play in the delivery of education, but the pandemic also demonstrated its limitations. I know every member in this chamber has heard from constituents of ours about the difficulties during the pandemic with online learning, and especially with young children at home.

For the past two years, our kids were isolated. Many students had trouble adapting to remote learning, and some even experienced physical and mental health challenges—and that's for those people who had access to Internet, and stable Internet. I know many of us were working from home, had children trying to learn from home—and in rural ridings, we know that can be difficult. It's not surprising, considering the COVID-19 pandemic was a frightening time for all Ontarians, but especially for children, who lost two years of normal school experience.

Thankfully, Ontario's Plan to Catch Up includes significant investments to help students cope with these anxieties. In fact, we are delivering a \$90-million investment in student mental health supports. That includes \$10 million in new funding, and it represents a 420% increase in student mental health funding compared to the previous NDP-backed Liberal government's plan in 2017-18.

The simple truth is that mental health is health. We cannot begin to fix all the damage caused by the pandemic without acknowledging this fact and providing meaningful mental health supports for our young people.

Student mental health is just one issue that needs to be addressed. The reality of this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic meant students would face new obstacles in their education. Now, as we emerge from the pandemic and return to our normal lives, we need to be prepared to help those young people who bore the weight of many public health restrictions.

Students are excited to be back in the classroom, to see their friends and their teachers, and to be back to normal activities. Although I don't have young children at home anymore, I know, from watching the news on back-to-school day and seeing the young kids who were super excited to be out there talking to the reporters—even their parents—how excited they were to return to normal and to

see their teachers, to see their friends, and to have those fun learning activities in class.

A global trend emerged, and it has become visible in the United Kingdom, the United States and across Canada. Students across the country and around the world experienced similar challenges with remote learning and other pandemic-related disruptions to education. In a nutshell, we are seeing steep declines in math, reading and writing.

As the recently released EQAO results demonstrate, that trend is unfortunately visible here in Ontario as well. As the Minister of Colleges and Universities, I find it troubling as that continues, possibly into high school and into the post-secondary world—the possibility of that.

The EQAO assessments showed a decline in every subject field except for grade 6 reading. Grade 3 students experienced a four-point decline in reading, a seven-point decline in writing, and a small drop in mathematics. Grade 6 students saw a further three-point decline in math, from 50 to 47. This is a real problem, and it is even more profound for French-language students, who saw a 33-point drop. Grade 9 followed the same trend, with math scores dropping 23 points for English-language students and 25 points for French-language students.

Learning gaps created by the pandemic are a significant problem, but it is important to put things in their proper context. In Colorado, for instance, only 27% of students tested in the spring of 2021 met or exceeded state math standards, while here in Ontario 67% of grade 3 students met or exceeded provincial math standards. In a comparative sense, Ontario is in better shape than other jurisdictions, and I want to make that clear. But it does not mean that we can afford to rest on our laurels. More work needs to be done.

It is for that reason that Ontario's Plan to Catch Up includes the largest tutoring program in Ontario's history. Our government is investing \$176 million to expand access to free, school-based tutoring so thousands of Ontario students can utilize learning resources in their communities to help them succeed. Since April of this year, over 150,000 students as well as over 18,000 special-education students have accessed local board-provided tutoring supports. In addition, many parents have taken their own initiative and invested in tutoring supports for their own children.

Our government believes parents should be in the driver's seat when it comes to their children's education, and we were elected to make life more affordable for hard-working families in my riding of Simcoe North, as well as across Ontario. For those reasons, our government recently announced the availability of catch-up payments to parents. As you know, Madam Speaker, our government delivered over \$1.6 billion in direct payments to parents through three dedicated support programs to help families cover the costs of child care and at-home learning created by the pandemic.

I am proud to say that we are going even further by investing \$365 million in direct financial relief to parents, who could use some extra support in uncertain times to help their kids catch up. Through this program, parents

with school-aged children up to 18 years will receive \$200 per child. Parents with school-aged children with special-education needs up to 21 years of age will receive \$250 per child. Being at home this weekend, I talked to many constituents, when I was out, who mentioned that they had already signed up and were accessing the program and were very happy about the additional supports.

I am told that over 970,000 applications for catch-up payments have been submitted, which amounts to over one third of eligible students in our province. Applications for catch-up payments will remain open until March 31, 2023. Madam Speaker, I hope that you and all honourable members of this House will encourage parents of school-aged children in our respective ridings to apply as soon as possible. We need these additional supports.

As an aside, I think another big reason Ontario students may have weathered the pandemic storm a bit better than students in other jurisdictions is that our government is strongly committed to improving public education, and we are delivering tangible results. Our government is providing school boards with \$26.6 billion in total funding for the 2022-23 school year, which is the highest investment in public education in Ontario's history. Average per pupil funding through the Grants for Student Needs program has risen to over \$13,000, which is an 2.7% increase over last year and yet another record high.

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Our government has also been busy updating the curriculum to ensure it does a better job of preparing young people for the jobs of tomorrow. We are taking these actions because the world is changing, and the stakes could not be higher. As technology advances, the global economy is increasingly becoming a digital economy. We must adjust to the reality or run the risk of getting left behind. It is estimated that more than 40% of jobs in Canada are at elevated risk of getting disrupted by technology and computers.

Moreover, Ontario is in the middle of a skilled labour shortage of nearly 370,000 unfilled jobs just here in this province. And one of the most crucial labour shortages is in the skilled trades. We will need at least 100,000 additional trades workers over the next decade to build desperately needed housing for Ontarians. By 2025, it is estimated that one in five jobs in Ontario will be in the skilled trades, but the average age of people entering the trades is 29.

Madam Speaker, since our government was first elected in 2018, we have addressed this challenge by reviewing and updating the province's curriculum. More specifically, this has meant making financial literacy and digital fluency key priorities, investing \$200 million to support a four-year math strategy; teaching valuable transferable skills such as leadership, communication, collaboration and critical thinking; improving science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM learning; and my favourite, promoting the skilled trades as a top-choice career path for young people and increasing awareness of and access to apprenticeship programs.

Two years ago, we launched an updated elementary math curriculum that teaches coding skills starting as early

as grade 1. Mandatory learning on coding from grades 1 to 9 will further enshrine Ontario as a STEM leader.

Last year, our government launched a destreamed grade 9 math course that builds on earlier skilled trades-related learning and drills down on financial literacy, including interest rates and budgeting.

And earlier this year, we introduced a new science and technology curriculum, including a destreamed grade 9 science course.

Madam Speaker, our government is making progress improving STEM learning in schools and in promoting skilled trades as a first career choice.

In my former ministry of women and children's issues, I was an advocate for women entering the skilled trades and starting this in early grades and really allowing girls to have the opportunity to use their hands. We have a great opportunity to increase the number of women in skilled trades and promote the great opportunities and advantages they will have.

These are key reasons why I believe Ontario students will effectively catch up and overcome any learning gaps created by the pandemic. Mind you, my assessment is based on there being no further disruptions to student learning this school year.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, or CUPE, has threatened a strike that could put over 55,000 education workers, custodians, early childhood educators and administrative staff on the picket lines at the worst possible time.

Let me be clear, Madam Speaker: Our government deeply respects Ontario education workers and the valuable work they do. I see it every day. I've seen it in my own children's learning over the years. We have the utmost respect for them. School custodians and early childhood educators are excellent examples of unsung heroes who performed their jobs magnificently during the pandemic.

That said, it is completely irresponsible for the leadership of CUPE to rile up its members by making completely—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. I apologize for interrupting the minister.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We now have to move to members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'm delighted to rise in the House today to extend my sincere congratulations to the members of municipal councils and school boards newly elected in the city of Windsor and the town of Tecumseh:

—in the city of Windsor, Mayor Drew Dilkens and councillors Fred Francis, Fabio Costante, Renaldo Agostino, Mark McKenzie, Ed Sleiman, Jo-Anne Gignac,

Angelo Marignani, Gary Kaschak, Kieran McKenzie, and Jim Morrison;

—in the town of Tecumseh, Mayor Gary McNamara, Deputy Mayor Joe Bachetti, and councillors Alicia Higgison, James Dorner, Rick Tonial, Brian Houston, and Tania Jobin;

—at the Greater Essex County District School Board, trustees Connie Buckler, Sarah Cipkar, Cathy Cooke, Gale Simko-Hatfield, Kim McKinley, Christie Nelson, and Linda Qin;

—at the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, trustees Kim Bouchard, Mary Heath, Joe Iacono, Jason Lazarus, Bernard Mastromattei and Fulvio Valentini;

—au Conseil scolaire catholique Providence, les conseillers et conseillères Christine Brooks, Janine Brydges, Jacques Kenny et Pauline Morais; et

—au Conseil scolaire Viamonde, la conseillère Emmanuelle Richez.

I want to acknowledge and thank every person who put their name on a ballot during this past municipal election. We in this House can truly relate to your experience, and we know you will all set a strong foundation for serving our community well.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

MPP Jill Andrew: This past weekend, along Yonge Street, Iranian community members, friends, family and allies from near and far stood together in solidarity, lining the streets in the name of justice—justice for Mahsa Amini, and justice for Iranian people everywhere. I witnessed the car horns, the cheers, the Iranian flags surfing the wind and chants for peace, freedom and democracy. I also witnessed the heavy hearts of people worried about their family and friends back home in Iran and abroad.

Speaker, I stand in solidarity with women. I stand in solidarity with Iranian women who advocate against the policing of women's bodies and who are fighting for their right to choose what they wear, how they wear it and when they wear it.

I stand in solidarity with allies who recognize that to ensure the progress of all members of our communities, we must galvanize to ensure women's safety against all forms of violence.

I stand in solidarity with the Iranian-Canadians for Justice and Human Rights, a non-partisan and non-religious organization of community activists, not to mention countless numbers of students who have organized peaceful protests for women's rights, justice and freedom from systemic oppression.

Mahsa Amini should still be on this earth. This 22-year-old Iranian woman was killed in her prime because the Guidance Patrol, Iran's "morality police," didn't approve of how she wore her hijab. Mahsa Amini and protesters before and after her across the globe who have been killed in pursuit of human rights should still be here.

We must never forget. We can never forget our responsibility to stand up against gender-based violence—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. The time has run out.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Much like the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, I too wish to congratulate all of the candidates and those elected or re-elected in municipal elections across Ontario, but in particular in my riding of Durham, in the municipalities of Clarington, Oshawa and Scugog.

Congratulations to Clarington mayor Adrian Foster, who was re-elected for another term. And congratulations to regional councillors Granville Anderson and Willie Woo and ward councillors Sami Elhajjeh, Lloyd Rang, Corinna Traill and Margaret Zwart.

In Oshawa, I congratulate re-elected mayor Dan Carter, councillors Robert Chapman and Rosemary McConkey, and the other elected and re-elected councillors.

In the township of Scugog, we have retiring mayor Bobbie Drew being replaced by incoming mayor Wilma Wotten. I recognize Regional Councillor Ian McDougall and local councillors David LeRoy, Janna Guido, Robert Rock, Harold Wright and Terry Coyne, elected in ward 5.

I congratulate all the trustees elected and re-elected to our public and Catholic boards in the riding.

And I convey my gratitude and admiration for all who stood for public office in these past municipal elections in Clarington, Oshawa and Scugog. This is what makes our democracy strong—when good citizens come forward and put their names on the ballot and debate thoughtfully with fellow citizens.

THE WRIGHT CLINIC

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today it's my honour to talk about an amazing organization operating in London–Fanshawe. This past summer, I had the honour of touring the Wright Clinic, a dental clinic founded by Dr. Ken Wright and the London Community Dental Alliance to provide affordable dental care to low-income individuals and families. Dr. Wright's vision for this clinic started many years ago when he saw the need in our community for affordable dental care.

1020

Operating out of the Glen Cairn Community Resource Centre, the clinic is able to serve some of the most vulnerable members of our community. While social assistance programs often provide coverage for dental care, the allotments fall short of most fees. The Wright Clinic offers truly affordable care, regardless of resources. This clinic is a one-of-a-kind model, able to hire a full-time staff and supplement their services through volunteer dentists and hygienists. The clinic also works with Western University and Fanshawe College students, giving them valuable training opportunities.

This model of service is what compassionate care looks like. The Wright Clinic is a testament to the power of community and what can be accomplished through vision, determination and co-operation. This clinic is a beacon of hope to many who previously believed oral care was beyond their reach. I am so proud to have this dental care clinic in my community.

Congratulations to the Wright Clinic.

EVENTS IN MARKHAM–UNIONVILLE

Mr. Billy Pang: Today I am extremely excited to share with you that, after the long period of isolation and concerns, Markham–Unionville has seen a very active, lively and festive October, one of the highlights being the first Downtown Markham Charity Exotic Car Show, where many sponsors, philanthropists and abundant spectators came together for a great cause. The event was a great success. It raised \$50,635 to support the SickKids Foundation for their new hospital and patient support buildings. We hope that more children will get better treatments and live the happy lives they deserve. I'm extremely proud of Speedstar and Saturns Drives for organizing this event.

This highly anticipated event took place in our downtown Markham, where we celebrated Canada Day on July 1, and now showcased some of the world's greatest sports cars and classics. That afternoon, I saw many car lovers come with their whole family and enjoy seeing those unique and beautiful vehicles up close.

I'm very proud of the Markham–Unionville communities coming together to help one another and to help build a more resilient, more cohesive and more caring Ontario. I cannot emphasize enough that Ontario is indeed a world of experiences, and I'm thrilled that Markham–Unionville is a part of such. What a fast and fabulous experience.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: Social assistance recipients in Ontario deserve to live with dignity, but the current rates do not reflect this.

Constituents across my riding have shared their stories with my office about their experience living on social assistance.

One family granted me permission to share their story. It's a parent and their child, and they're both currently living on ODSP. They told me how their monthly income is impossible to live on. These are some of their stories.

"I have had to borrow money to buy groceries or meds or food for my cats. I cannot pay for everything all in one month."

"I cannot pay any of my bills in full each month or I would not be able to put food on the table every day."

"People on ODSP cannot move in with their boyfriends/girlfriends or their ODSP will be cut drastically or eliminated all together.... So someone on ODSP cannot move in with their partner or marry them if they make more money than ODSP gives monthly."

“We deserve to be able to hold our heads up high and be proud of our lives.”

“With the amounts people get right now, we all feel like dogs begging for scraps at the feet of people in charge. It’s degrading and pointless for anyone to feel like this in their life.”

This family is not alone. It’s absolutely heartbreaking. Their voices need to be heard, and today we need to make the decision, the government needs to make the decision, to double the rates for OW and ODSP.

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

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Ms. Laurie Scott: As we approach Remembrance Day, I am honoured to rise to recognize the men and women who sacrificed so much for our freedom and democracy we enjoy today.

I would like to thank the Royal Canadian Legion members and volunteers, not only in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock but those all across our country, for their time and effort spent supporting veterans, their families and our local communities.

In my riding, there are 16 Legions who look after 21 cenotaphs. This year, the Sir Sam Hughes Legion Branch 67 of Lindsay and the Sunderland Legion Branch 141 of Brock township are celebrating the 100th anniversary of their cenotaphs.

Cenotaphs are important historical symbols, as they represent those who died in war who are buried where they fell. They stand as a reminder of our commitment to honouring the sacrifices of brave men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces.

During World War I, there was great emphasis on communities large and small. Everyone knew someone or a family whose members were overseas. They were local farmers, schoolteachers, shop owners, fathers and sons who headed to the front lines to fight for everyone. While back at home, these communities supported the efforts, with women working the farms, the factories, knitting socks, making bandages and pyjamas and quilts, writing letters and cards with support of the Women’s Institute and the Red Cross.

Let us take time to remember all those who served and continue to serve our country this November. Lest we forget.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I rise today to speak on behalf of the many residents of Don Valley West who have contacted me to ask this government to reverse course on two bills. Last week, they were asking this government to reverse course on a housing bill that could see many residents who rent in Don Valley West lose their apartments if Bill 23 is enacted as is. This week, they are writing to say “what can we do” to stop Bill 28 and protect

the wages of education workers, many of whom care for our kids every day for less than \$40,000 a year, and their charter right to bargain, which this government will simply punch out by using their version of the “easy” button: the “notwithstanding” clause.

Ontarians, including the workers employed by this government in our schools and hospitals, many of whom are women, are struggling with an affordability crisis. Yet this government is more focused on fighting with workers than addressing the issues, using easy tactics like writing \$100 cheques instead of working hard to strike a deal which would help workers’ families cope with inflation. The government strategy is to spend millions of taxpayer dollars to fight in court, instead of talking at the bargaining table, while the province records a \$2-billion surplus.

The finance minister talked yesterday about the need to be prudent. Of course we need to be prudent with taxpayer money, but prudent doesn’t mean unfair. Not paying education workers a fair wage hurts them and their families.

We have seen the crisis created by this government by not paying nurses fairly, which caused a shortage of them. Let’s not repeat that with education workers.

HAMILTON 40 UNDER FORTY BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Ms. Donna Skelly: I’d like to take this time to congratulate the recipients of this year’s Hamilton 40 Under Forty Business Achievement Awards. This program celebrates the accomplishments of 40 young adults who have demonstrated an exceptional level of success in the private, public and non-profit sectors. The 40 Under Forty is one of Hamilton’s most prestigious business awards. These recipients are role models for business and the community at large. They have shown an exceptional level of accomplishment in their respective fields. They have demonstrated an extraordinary level of success and leadership within their workplace.

Throughout the pandemic, these young entrepreneurs faced challenges and proved they could overcome some difficult obstacles. They have shown resilience, tenacity, strength and community spirit.

It’s an extraordinary accomplishment to receive a Hamilton 40 Under Forty Business Achievement Award. That is why I am so proud to tell you that one of this year’s recipients is a young woman named Rachel Green, who owns and operates two successful businesses in Hamilton. She is a mom, entrepreneur and philanthropist, and she is my daughter-in-law.

Congratulations to all.

1030

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Speaker, seven confirmed deaths in Ontario in September; six confirmed deaths in August; four confirmed deaths in July—41 confirmed since November 2021. These are the women in Ontario who have died of femicide—the intentional killing

of women or children—each month as recorded by the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses.

About one in three women in the world and one in three in Canada will be physically or sexually abused by their partner in their lifetime.

Every woman and every girl deserves to live in safety, with dignity, free from intimidation and the threat of violence. That is why our government is investing \$198 million for victims of violence and \$11 million for violence prevention initiatives. We are taking action, as we should, but we must do more.

Violence against women and girls comes in many forms. All of us, particularly those in charge of keeping us safe, need to understand the dangers and the signs of abuse. Yes, violence can be physical or sexual, but it can also include threats, coercive control or intimidation. We must listen to the evidence of abused women and take them seriously. November is Woman Abuse Prevention Month, and if we as a society and those in charge of keeping us safe don't understand the signs or the forms it takes, then we cannot bring the violence to an end.

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

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(g), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore, the afternoon routine on Wednesday, November 2, 2022, shall commence at 1:00 p.m.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Joel Harden: I'd like to welcome my friend Michau van Speyk back into the Legislature again today. Nice to see you, Michau.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I know they are watching today, and I wanted to welcome the Scleroderma Society of Ontario. Tomorrow is their breakfast at 7:30 a.m. in the dining room. Please join them for breakfast burritos.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to welcome Patty Coates, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. Welcome to the chamber.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: She's just up in the visitors' gallery; I want to welcome my mother, Mary Jo Dowie, who is watching today.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I would like to introduce my friend, Kris Rivard, who was recently elected as a councillor on the West Nipissing council. Welcome to Queen's Park, Kris.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West has informed me she has a point of order.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to bring forward a motion without notice to immediately withdraw Bill 28, keeping kids in class act, and for the

Ford government to return to the table for a deal that is fair to students and workers and respects charter and human rights.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Member for London West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to bring forward a motion without notice to immediately withdraw Bill 28, keeping kids in class act, and for the Ford government to return to the table for a deal that is fair to students and workers and respects charter and human rights. Agreed? I heard some noes.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa–Vanier has a point of order.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Speaker, I am seeking unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing orders 45(b)(iii) and (iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion 1 be allocated as follows: 54 minutes to each of the recognized parties and 12 minutes to the independent members as a group.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa–Vanier is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 45(b)(iii) and (iv), the time for debate on opposition day motion number 1 be allocated as follows: 54 minutes to each of the recognized parties and 12 minutes to the independent members as a group. Agreed? Agreed.

MINISTER'S COMMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Earlier today, the member for Scarborough–Guildwood provided me with written notice of her intention to raise a point of privilege relating to remarks made yesterday by the Minister of Education with respect to Bill 28. I would invite the member to make her presentation on this point.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. Today, I provided you with written notice on a question of privilege regarding comments made by the Minister of Education, Mr. Stephen Lecce, in reference to Bill 28, Keeping Students in Class Act, 2022.

Presuming passage of legislation has long been established by this chamber to be a prima facie case of privilege, and it is my belief that comments made by the Minister of Education over the past few hours qualify as a breach of parliamentary privilege.

As this bill was tabled on the afternoon of October 31 and the minister's comments were made that same day, I am raising this point at the earliest opportunity and I am asking you to find that a prima facie case of contempt has been established.

After Bill 28 was introduced on Monday, October 31, the Minister of Education took part in a press conference at Queen's Park, during which the minister stated that "... it is certainly our intention that kids will be in school, we will pass a law." The transcripts and video recording from this press conference confirm this.

The minister was also quoted in an article written by the Canadian Press, confirmed by video recording, saying, "The government is going to pass the bill. We're going to move forward."

Speaker, I believe that not only has the Minister of Education presumed passage of Bill 28 on multiple occasions, but that there is precedent from previous Speakers of this House to find a prima facie case of contempt.

For example, in 1997, Speaker Stockwell made a ruling on a question of privilege on a ministry pamphlet claiming that "new city wards will be created." Speaker Stockwell stated, "In my opinion, they convey the impression that the passage of the requisite legislation was not necessary or was a foregone conclusion, or that the assembly and Legislature had a pro forma, tangential, even inferior role in the legislative and lawmaking process, and in doing so, they appear to diminish the respect that is due to this House."

In that case, Speaker Stockwell laid out a very strict, two-pronged test for whether the presumed passage of legislation before this House could be deemed a breach of privilege and establish a prima facie case of contempt. To quote Speaker Stockwell, "However, I am very concerned by the ministry pamphlet, which was worded more definitely than the commercial and the press release. To name but a few examples, the brochure claims that 'new city wards will be created,' that 'work on building the new city will start in 1997,' and that 'the new city of Toronto will reduce the number of municipal politicians.'

"How is one to interpret such unqualified claims? In my opinion, they convey the impression that the passage of the requisite legislation was not necessary or was a foregone conclusion, or that the assembly and the Legislature had a pro forma, tangential, even inferior role in the legislative and law-making process, and in doing so, they appear to diminish the respect that is due to this House. I would not have come to this view had these claims or proposals—and that is all they are—been qualified by a statement that they would only become law if and when the Legislature gave its stamp of approval to them," concludes Speaker Stockwell.

1040

Additionally, Speaker Peters more recently provided examples of government language that respects the role of the Legislature and should have been included as qualifiers in the minister's public statement. To quote Speaker Peters, "I cannot find that the language used is dismissive of the legislative role of the House. On the contrary, the use of qualifying language such as 'we are proposing' can only leave the impression that further steps are required before implementation is possible. I cannot find, therefore, that a prima facie case of contempt has been established."

Speaker, as you are aware, the most recent edition of Erskine May describes contempt as follows: "Other acts, besides words spoken or writings published reflecting upon either House or its proceedings which, though they do not tend directly to obstruct or impede either House in the performance of its functions, yet have a tendency to

produce this result indirectly by bringing such House into odium, contempt or ridicule or by lowering its authority, may constitute contempts."

I believe that the Minister of Education's statement was presuming that the government, on its own, had the ability that superseded the will of this entire House. Therefore, it is clear that the public statements made by the minister regarding Bill 28 meet the test set out by Speaker Stockwell and do not include any of the qualifying language cited by Speaker Peters. As such, Speaker, I'm asking you to find that a prima facie case of contempt has been established.

Additionally, as the Minister of Education has publicly stated his intent to fast-track the bill without thorough debate or meaningful public consultation, it is imperative that this ruling on this matter occur as soon as is possible. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I thank the member for Scarborough–Guildwood for the point of privilege. Are there any other members that would want to speak to it?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise as the House leader for the official opposition to offer a few brief comments on the point of privilege that was raised by the member.

Certainly, we share concerns about public statements about this legislation that have been made by the Minister of Education but, more importantly, we have grave concerns about the content of this legislation. This is a bill that will have profound and lasting implications for public education and for the future of collective bargaining in this province. The use of the "notwithstanding" clause to suppress constitutionally protected charter rights is the first time the "notwithstanding" clause has been exercised in this way in Canada. We look forward to your ruling on this matter of privilege.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Are there any other comments?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's good to be able to rise and provide some context. The member's arguments are based entirely on a very narrow and unrepresentative selection of the comments of the Minister of Education yesterday. The minister used conditional language expressing the government's intention regarding the bill in signifying that additional steps are required before the House. When the minister's remarks are read in their entire context, it is clear that the minister was respectful and did not presume the will of the House.

In addition to the quotes the member has referenced, allow me to read several other quotes in which the minister was clearly deferential to the assembly and to the legislative process. For greater clarity, I will table a transcript of the entire press conference at the completion of my remarks.

The first quote, from the Minister of Education yesterday: "If we do not act today with legislation, schools will close on Friday.... If we do not introduce this law today, and pass it ahead of Thursday, CUPE will again be able to walk out of a class with hours' notice."

An additional quote from the minister: “The government has been left with no choice but to take immediate action today. That’s why we introduced the Keeping Students in Class Act that would establish a four-year collective agreement with CUPE education workers across the province that ensures children remain in class where they belong.”

Note here that the minister used the conditional word “would,” signifying that the bill would require passage by the assembly.

Now, an additional quote: “Because if we don’t act today, if we don’t introduce legislation as we speak, there will be a strike on Friday.”

Another quote by the minister: “This proposal, this legislation provides absolute stability for kids to the extent we can control it and ensures they remain in a classroom.”

Again I draw our attention, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that the minister expressed qualifying language describing the bill as a “proposal,” signifying that additional steps are required before the implementation is possible.

An additional quote: The minister says, “And so we will act. We will introduce this legislation.”

Again, Mr. Speaker, the minister has gone out of his way to be deferential to Parliament.

Another quote: “And I think it would be very, very unfair to children, even after the government passes the law, which is the intent ahead of Friday, to see millions of kids pay the price again for another day of escalation by the unions.” Again, the minister says “which is the intent,” Speaker.

Clearly, from the context of the minister’s full remarks, the minister was not presuming the will of the assembly, just the opposite.

Statements like those referenced by the member opposite indicate only the government’s intention to pursue the passage of legislation and not a presumption of the will of the House, despite the fact that we hold the majority.

Now, while Speaker Stockwell is an authority, I also reference a more recent decision from Speaker Levac on May 18, 2017, in which the Speaker states in a similar matter, “The ads make bold statements, as I noted in my March 23 ruling, but they also have to be taken as a whole. The predominant links and the references to the ‘Fair Hydro Plan’ website are just as much a part of the ad as the other statements in them. The advertising and messaging on Bill 132 that has been drawn to my attention, including that provided by the government House leader, contains language that, in my opinion, is suitably deferential to the requisite and superior role of this House in first passing the legislation to enact the plan.”

That was from Speaker Levac on May 18, 2017. The Speaker went on to say, “Finally, the 1997 Stockwell ruling precedent that has rightly become so influential in the area of government advertising was made in a context where legislation was then currently before the House, though the then government advertised about its application in a way that conveyed the impression that it was a done deal. I have not had similar advertising specific to Bill 132 brought to my attention.”

In this case, the Speaker did not find a prima facie case of contempt or breach of privilege. I submit that the facts in this case are even less in support of such a finding. In this matter, there has been no purposeful government advertising, only statements made in a press conference, some in prepared remarks and some off the cuff in response to quick questions from journalists. In any case, the minister’s remarks are factual but not presumptive of the will of this House; they discuss eventualities if legislation is not introduced by the government and they discuss the government’s desire to pass such legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that there is no case for a prima facie breach of privilege. As I said, Mr. Speaker, I will table the full transcript of the minister’s press conference.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Are there any other members who wish so speak to this? The member for Ottawa Centre.

Mr. John Fraser: In spite of my colleague’s representation of qualifying statements, the minister presupposed the will of this House. It’s very clear what was said, and whether that was intended to send a signal to the bargaining table or here in this chamber, it wasn’t right and I ask that you fully consider this case.

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

1050

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the opportunity to stand in support of the member from Scarborough–Guildwood in her point of privilege today. I believe the member has established that the comments made by the minister presume passage of Bill 28. But I also contend that the minister’s actions, in addition to the minister’s words, presume passage of the bill, because the government has simply refused to go back to the negotiating table. If the government were not presuming passage of the bill this week, I believe it would be in the best interest of the government and the people of Ontario for the government to continue to negotiate with education workers in this province.

All of us have an important role to play in this House. Yes, we are members—well, most of us are members—of political parties, but at the end of the day—

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: You’re all part of our family, though. Yes, absolutely. You’re all part of the family.

At the end of the day, we represent our constituents. We represent the people of our ridings, the people who elected us. To presume that partisan politics plays a larger role, and then that role of us as members of this House—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: No, no, no. I’m sorry.

It is an important role to play. We’re looking at the first Westminster government—Parliament right now has shown what can happen when you presume passage of legislation that your own party members don’t support. That’s an important role that governments play, that’s an important role that individual MPPs play in this House.

The government may be taking a chainsaw to charter rights with this bill, but they should not violate parliamentary privilege by presumption of passage of

legislation before every member of this House has had the opportunity to vote on it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I want to thank the member for Scarborough–Guildwood for her written presentation as well as her comments this morning. I also thank the member for London West, the government House leader, the member for Ottawa South and the member for Guelph for their submissions and their comments.

I will consider the matter carefully and report back to the House as soon as we can.

QUESTION PERIOD

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is to the Premier.

Good morning, Premier. It's good to see you here.

Yesterday the Minister of Education said he was tabling Bill 28 because it was in the best interest of students. Let me say, Speaker, that's pretty rich coming from a government that has shown time and time again how little they actually care for our kids and our students. They've underfunded our schools, increased class sizes, forced kids into online classes, and kept kids out of classrooms longer than any other jurisdiction. That is not the behaviour of a government that cares about kids—and neither is Bill 28.

Will the Premier stop this, roll up his sleeves and work with education workers to invest in our students?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, we're making sure that the students stay in class. I'm going to repeat that: They're going to stay in class. We want parents to know that we're doing everything we can to make sure students don't miss one single day in class.

We've been at the table, we put a very fair offer, and the union continues to charge ahead with a strike action that would affect this province this Friday. That means there would be two million students sitting at home and probably a million parents who would be taking work off.

I want to be clear: We will never, ever waver from our position that students remain in class, catching up with their learning, surrounded by friends, with a full school experience, including extracurricular activities.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: While it's good to hear the Premier finally be allowed to speak by his government there, I've got to tell you, on Friday, kids are going to be out of school in many parts of this province because your government is going to disrupt that.

Ontarians want to know why this Premier is not standing up for the custodians and the maintenance workers who are keeping our schools clean and safe or the educational assistants supporting our students with special needs, or the ECEs who are teaching our littlest kids. Speaker, this government—they have all the power and the privilege. All these workers have is their union and their right to bargain collectively.

It is not too late. Fix the mess you're making today.

Will the Premier speak up and stop this bill?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I will remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

The Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: There is only one party in this chamber that is standing up for students and parents, and that's the PC Party.

The Liberals and NDP want to make sure they stand up for the heads of the union. Our party differentiates between labour and labour leadership. We support the front-line labour folks. We support the fact that the front-line folks get 131 days of sick days; we're okay with that. But what we don't support is the unreasonable request from CUPE leadership that they demand a nearly 50% increase—a 50% increase.

Mr. Speaker, the union refuses to withdraw their strike notice even after we put forward a very generous offer. We've already—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Back to the Premier: This government is violating the rights of 55,000 Ontario workers. And those workers are parents too—news flash. Bill 28 is going to hurt them and it's going to hurt their families. There is no “notwithstanding” clause for workers who can't afford to pay their bills.

The Premier is forcing these workers to accept a shameful deal while they starve our classrooms, and they're sitting on billions of education dollars at the same time.

And do you know the irony, Mr. Speaker? The irony is that this bill—this government—is going to force the education workers out. That's what's going to do it. This bill is going to close our schools—this bill right here.

Will the Premier stop coming after workers, tear up this terrible bill and return to the bargaining table today?

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, I ask the opposition: Stop attacking and going after our students. Stop going after our parents. Stop going after the two million students who want to be in the classroom.

They talk about 54,000 workers; we're talking about over a million parents who would take work off because you want to feather the nest of the heads of the union. That's unacceptable.

We want to take care of the front-line, hard-working educational workers, and we'll always have their backs. But do you know something? We aren't going to feather the nest of the head of CUPE.

Again, we differentiate between labour and labour leadership. I think the labour needs to find new labour leadership.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

I realize that members care passionately and deeply about this issue, but I need to be able to hear the member who has the floor, and I'll ask the House to come to order.

Start the clock.

The next question.

LABOUR DISPUTE
CONFLIT DE TRAVAIL

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. But before I ask it, I'll just assure the Premier that the members of those unions, who are providing our children the support today, want what has been put forward, and any suggestion that their wishes aren't being represented is simply not accurate.

Speaker, education workers are critical to our schools. They're the librarians who help our kids develop a love of reading. They're the educational assistants who go above and beyond to help those children who are dealing with disabilities. They're the secretaries who keep our schools running. But instead of valuing these workers and paying them a fair wage, listening to what they want and actually meeting them at a fair point, the government is determined to drive them right out of our schools.

Why does the government have such a hard time recognizing the important role education workers play in our schools?

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

1100

Hon. Stephen Lecce: While the NDP and Liberals sit on the sidelines, this government will stand up for students and keep them in class. That is what a responsible government would do.

Mr. Speaker, we believe in a simple principle, as communicated by the Premier: that children should be in the classroom. It has been a very difficult past few years. It started with strikes, followed by a global pandemic. We have a moral obligation to ensure they are in school, in front of their teachers, with their friends, learning skills—not at home on a Friday or any day this school year.

We've been very clear in our intention to stand up for students—and parents—and ensure they're in school every day.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: Let's be clear, if this government cared about children in our schools, they wouldn't beat up on the people who are looking after them.

Yesterday was a dark day for Ontario workers. Bill 28 not only disrespects education workers but also tramples their collective bargaining rights by imposing a contract, denying them the right to strike and levying fines against those who dare defy the Premier's orders. This government's use of the "notwithstanding" clause is massive overreach and a clear message to workers that their concerns just don't matter.

New Democrats call on this government to reverse course, withdraw Bill 28 and return to the bargaining table to bargain in actual good faith. Will the government commit to doing that today?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: The members opposite can't have it both ways. Either you support this strike or you stand with this government, vote for this bill and keep kids

in the classroom. Pick a lane. The NDP wants to have it both ways, and they simply can't. They need to declare a clear position to the constituents in their ridings. Will they vote for this bill that provides stability for children, or will they stand with this union on a strike that no one will tolerate in the province of Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Final supplementary, the member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Le projet de loi 28 est de l'intimidation envers les travailleurs et les travailleuses de l'éducation. Il limite leurs salaires et, dans certains cas, les force à aller dans les banques alimentaires. Les actions de ce gouvernement vont enlever des adultes de nos salles de classe, et ce sont nos enfants qui vont en payer le prix.

Le premier ministre va créer une crise des ressources humaines dans nos écoles, de la même façon qu'il l'a fait dans nos hôpitaux, avec leurs politiques de bas salaires.

Est-ce que le premier ministre va faire marche arrière avec le projet de loi 28, soutenir les travailleurs et les travailleuses de l'éducation et retourner à la table des négociations?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

We are very committed to keeping kids in school. We've heard the voices of parents who have told us of the difficulty and the hardship they faced with respect to the pandemic and the strikes that preceded just a short few years ago.

While we remain committed to getting a deal with any willing partner in education to provide stability, we will not tolerate impacts on kids. We will not accept a child being out of school for even one day. We're taking action to stand up for children while we continue in good faith with our labour partners to get a deal so that we can all bring forth a program that is fair for workers, whom we respect. It's why we are hiring 1,800 more of them in this program. It's why this Progressive Conservative government has hired nearly 7,000 more education workers, to date, in our schools.

Mr. Speaker, we'll continue our work, listen to parents, stand up for students and keep these kids in school.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock for a moment.

I realize this is out of order, but I want to welcome the schoolchildren who are here in the east and west public galleries. We're glad to have you here to observe question period.

I know all members will join me in wanting to impress those schoolchildren today.

Start the clock.

Next question.

CONFLIT DE TRAVAIL
LABOUR DISPUTE

M^{me} Chandra Pasma: Les travailleurs et les travailleuses en éducation ont soutenu nos enfants chaque jour pendant les deux dernières années. Ils étaient à

l'école, même quand les écoles étaient fermées, à cause du travail important qu'ils font. Ils aiment leur travail. Ils veulent continuer de le faire. Mais ils ne peuvent plus le faire et payer leurs factures en même temps.

Le projet de loi du gouvernement attaque ces travailleurs si importants qui ne peuvent plus joindre les deux bouts. Pourquoi le premier ministre insiste-t-il pour imposer une politique de faibles salaires et les forcer à recourir aux banques alimentaires, au lieu de négocier une convention juste et raisonnable?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, it was just Sunday when we brought the union in a room to discuss an option to avert a strike, which CUPE alone called effective Friday. They put this province, with five days' notice, under a province-wide strike impacting two million children—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Davenport, come to order. The member for Niagara Falls, come to order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is our position that it is unacceptable and inconsistent with the values of parents who want their kids in the classroom. We agree. We understand the hardship this pandemic has imposed on kids and working parents. And we believe they should be in school, they should be with their educators, they should be with their friends. That should be a position supported by every member in this Legislature.

The Premier is right: We stand alone on this issue, and we will fight every day to ensure these kids remain in school.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You don't support kids by sending their grown-ups to a food bank.

Crystal, who lives in Ottawa West–Nepean, is a library tech, supporting over 600 kids at two different schools. She works long, exhausting days, then comes home to a diet of canned beans and rice because that's all she can afford. She does yard duty in shoes with holes in them because she can't afford to replace them. She still loves her job and she can't fathom doing anything else, but this government is driving workers like Crystal away.

Instead of trampling on the rights of workers like Crystal, will the Premier actually step up to support Crystal and the 620 kids she supports by scrapping this shameful bill and coming to the table to negotiate a fair deal?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We remain entirely committed to keeping children in school. We believe that these kids have paid a great price in the pandemic. I think it is absolutely responsible for this government to stand up and ensure they remain in class, right to June, without disruption. That is the obligation we have to families. We received a mandate from the people of this province to speak for these kids and give them a voice. We committed, in the summer, to a normal and stable return to class, and we are fulfilling that through this legislation, which we

hope will pass, designed to provide stability for the kids of this province.

HOUSING

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Ontario's housing supply is in a crisis. Housing was the leading issue of concern during the provincial and municipal elections. We share these concerns with our members opposite, who have often claimed to advocate for missing middle housing and to increase the supply of attainable and affordable housing in the province of Ontario. The issue of addressing the housing situation in our province transcends party lines and requires immediate action, as the status quo is not working.

Speaker, can the minister please elaborate on the bold and decisive actions our government is taking to address the concerns related to housing supply?

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for Mississauga–Lakeshore for that question. He's absolutely right. We know that the status quo is not working. The members opposite have even acknowledged that fact. If we continue down the path that this province has been on, there is going to be a generation that will never realize the dream of home ownership.

The proposed legislation takes several very important steps to make sure that Ontario has the additional housing supply it needs, by permitting more gentle intensification, through allowing three as-of-right units. Our proposed changes will lay the foundation for more missing middle housing.

Additionally, we're reducing building costs to incentivize the construction of affordable housing, not-for-profit housing and inclusionary zoning units right across this province.

What we're asking is that the opposition put partnership over partisanship and stop—

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

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Minister, for that response.

I'm sure that all members of this House have received questions and concerns from the people of their riding regarding what our government is doing to help individuals and families achieve the dream of home ownership. I know our government is committed to delivering on our mandate of building 1.5 million homes over the next decade. We all agree that the government must take bold and decisive actions to help those who feel left behind in the housing market.

1110

Can the minister please explain how this legislation will help Ontarians, newcomers and young first-time buyers realize their dream of home ownership?

Hon. Steve Clark: Again, I want to thank the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore. He's a true home-believer and a true champion for housing in his riding.

Our government is making sure that first-time homebuyers have access to the homes that they can afford. It's imperative that we use every tool that's available to us, including the creation of our new attainable housing program. It's going to reduce costs on affordable housing. It's going to parcel surplus provincial lands and take advantage of innovative technologies and also alternate housing-ownership models.

Speaker, Ontarians need and they deserve peace of mind when it comes to making the biggest purchase in their life. That's why I was proud, last week, to stand with Minister Rasheed, the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery, as we introduced the strictest consumer protection in Canada.

The opposition was right when they said we need all hands on deck. We just need them to change their approach. They have to start saying yes to creating new housing supply.

LABOUR DISPUTE

MPP Jamie West: My question to the Premier. Good morning, Premier. I want to tell you about Daniel Rancourt. He's an education support worker. His dedication to our children is absolutely immense. For 29 years, Daniel has kept our schools clean and safe for students and for staff. Unfortunately, his child has type 1 diabetes and that requires medication and medical supplies, and covering the cost of those necessary medical supplies is a huge struggle for Daniel.

Workers who are working 12 hours a day, five days a week, should be able to afford necessary medical expenses for their child, but Daniel said, "Put yourself in our shoes. With the rising cost of living, would you be able to live off our salary? This, Mr. Ford and Mr. Lecce"—I'm quoting—"means that as a father and a husband, I don't get to spend a lot of time at home."

My question: Will the Premier scrap this harmful bill, finally acknowledge the lives and struggle of the education support workers they're hurting, and direct his minister to sit down and finally negotiate a fair deal?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to keeping kids in the classroom. That is our priority. That is what is driving this legislation. It is why we are here today, because CUPE has decided, on Sunday, to announce a five-day strike.

CUPE alone put themselves on this footing. After all, it was CUPE that decided to proceed with a strike mandate even before the government tabled our first offer in the summer. This was their intention all along, and it is regrettable we are here. We shouldn't be here. We should have had a voluntary deal signed on Sunday that preserves stability and offers a reasonable offer to the workers: 10% over four years; maintaining the benefits, the pensions, the sick leave, which we believe is competitive—11 days paid at 100% and 120 days at 90%, the only program of its kind in the country.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment is to preserve those benefits to incent more of them to work and to ensure they show up on Friday, because our kids are depending on them to be there every day in this province.

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

MPP Jamie West: It would be lovely to hear from the Premier. The Premier was talking about supporting front-line folks. I want to remind him that 96.5% of those workers voted with the union and agreed with the negotiations.

Let me tell you about Charity. I keep telling the Premier about Charity. She is a full-time education support worker who earns so little from the Conservative government that she goes to food banks. Yesterday, I asked a question about it and got ignored by the Premier. I'm hoping to get an answer today. Charity doesn't understand why the Conservative government continues to attack workers like her. She called me yesterday and she said, "I am so scared right now. I'm honestly terrified. My kids are wearing the same Halloween costumes from last year because we couldn't afford new ones. I just want to go grocery shopping. We deserve better than the food bank."

Will the Premier finally answer and tell Charity why he doesn't care about her children or about workers like her?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I thank the members opposite. I think the Premier and every member of this Progressive Conservative Party is committed to ensuring Charity's children can be in school. That is the first obligation of this province. It is our responsibility to ensure these kids have stability, because children in Ontario and families in this province have seen the story before, the never-ending strikes imposed under successive Premiers, under different parties, and parents have had enough. That's why, Speaker, we brought forth a bill, with regret, knowing that there was an option for the union: Withdraw the strike and proceed with negotiations with the government. But they opted to proceed with this strike that no one wants, that will impose hardship on children, and the government has been clear on our obligation. We will ensure kids are in school; we will work every day to ensure they catch up, and that starts with them being in class in the first place. That's why we are prepared to meet with the negotiating team at any point, so long as strikes are off the table in this province.

WATER AND SEWAGE INFRASTRUCTURE

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Experts are projecting that Ontario's population is expected to increase by two to six million over the next 20 years. As many newcomers arrive in Ontario, in communities like mine, Newmarket–Aurora, York region is viewed as a favourable jurisdiction to settle down, raise a family and own a home. Many of my constituents have settled in this area, and to meet the future needs of my community's growing population, our government must ensure environmentally sustainable growth for the great people of York region. Under the

previous Liberal government, we saw how they chose to dither, delay and neglect when it came to proper environmental planning and housing development for my region.

Can the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks please explain what our government is doing for housing development in York region?

Hon. David Piccini: I'd like to thank the member opposite for her leadership and advocacy to support a critical need in housing. We heard it through the last election and we know that our municipal counterparts heard it through theirs. For years, Ontarians have struggled to find attainable home ownership. Parents and grandparents are looking in the eyes of their children, wondering if they'll ever have a place to call home. And if we're going to be honest with ourselves, Speaker, that means we need to build the critical infrastructure to support that housing growth. Simply put, Ontarians deserve reliability and strong environmental oversight for simple actions like turning the faucet on or flushing the toilet.

It's not sexy, I know, but for years, the previous Liberal government ignored this critical infrastructure needed to give people the dignity of a roof over their head and a place to call home, and for years, these regions struggled to meet their population growth numbers because of neglect by the previous Liberal government. Well, I'm proud to say that under the leadership of this Premier and this Minister of Housing, we're solving the problem. We are getting shovels in ground on the roads, the bridges, the houses and, yes, the critical water and waste water infrastructure needed so that people can have a place to call home in the province of Ontario.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Speaker, it's great to hear from the minister about our government's actions on this file, which is of vital importance for the people of my riding. York region has waited on an answer to its Upper York Sewage Solutions proposal since 2014, and I know that our government has been steadfast in working on this file since we came to government. Our government assigned the York region waste water independent advisory panel to consider options regarding addressing waste water solutions for the future. The panel has now published a report backing the Duffin Creek treatment facility for waste water management.

Can the minister please elaborate on how this decision was made and why this is the right choice for all of Ontario and my community of Newmarket–Aurora in the great region of York?

Hon. David Piccini: Again, thank you to the member for that important question. I would like to thank the incredible work of the panel. They've worked hard over the last year to provide sage advice to this government. That advice is now public for all Ontarians to see and I'd like to thank them for that work. Speaker, they've put forward advice that is best for the environment—a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, thanks to the advice and work that this panel has done. Secondly, it's better for cost. They've saved over \$800 million for the ratepayers of York region, providing certainty for both

York and Durham regions so that folks can have a place to call home, not just today but for years to come.

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And finally, they've done the important work of looking at optimizing existing infrastructure. They've done excellent work, and that's why our ministry is here, providing certainty for both regions, to support the growth, working with Indigenous partners to meet important duty-to-consult requirements. And, Speaker—

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

LABOUR DISPUTE

MPP Jill Andrew: This question is to the Premier. The Conservative government introduced back-to-work legislation that disregards the value of 55,000 CUPE front-line education workers in our schools, many of them the lowest-paid workers in education, who are disproportionately women and BIPOC people. This government legislation blocks workers' bargaining rights, and charter and human rights. These are workers who make an average of \$39,000 a year as custodians, bus drivers, librarians, education assistants supporting students with disabilities and behavioural, lunchroom supervisors, hall monitors and early childhood educators. They're also parents.

My question is to the Premier. The Premier's salary is over \$208,000 a year. The Minister of Education's is over \$165,000 a year. Their salaries keep going up despite inflation. Why do the Premier and the minister think their work is five times more valuable than education workers caring for Ontario's children in our schools? Why are PCs paying education workers below inflation?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're committed to keeping kids in the classroom, where they belong. We think that is the priority of all parents in this province, who have seen the hardship, the disruption and the regression in learning, in mental and physical health, and social and emotional well-being. We have to stand up for these kids and give them a voice in this debate. They have been on the sidelines for too long. Strikes have been imposed on them for over 30 to 40 years. I think it's absolutely appropriate for the government to use every tool at our disposal to ensure stability and to protect the in-class learning experience these kids deserve in Ontario.

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

MPP Jill Andrew: The government's Keeping Students in Class Act will not keep students in class. It is bad legislation that disregards parents like Candice in my community, who might have to struggle to find unaffordable child care if education workers are forced to strike.

This pre-emptive strike legislation, similar to Conservative Bill 124 that produced a mass exodus of nurses from health care, will push education workers out the door, never to return. You cannot keep students in class without the caring adults, the education workers, who are the

backbone of our education system, helping them every step of the way.

My question is back to the Premier; it's nice to see you today. Will you stop this attack on education workers, get back to the bargaining table and honour our students, our future leaders, and education workers with a fair deal? That \$39,000 is not enough.

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

To reply, the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we believe very strongly that children should be in school. I think this discussion, this debate, is often about salaries, benefits, sick leave and entitlement. Why don't we start talking about the impact to kids in this province, the impact to children's mental and physical health, the learning loss that they feel at home when they're—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Toronto—St. Paul's, come to order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We believe strongly that kids should be in school. We've increased investments to public education to the highest levels recorded in the history of Ontario: \$680 million more. But in addition to the investments and the 7,000 more education staff we've hired since we came to power—we believe, as the first principle of our plan to catch up, that kids have to be in school. That's what we are fighting for. It's why we brought forward this bill in response to a union, CUPE, who has put themselves on a path to strike this Friday. We will do what is right to keep these kids in school.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. I want to be clear: I want students back in school in clean, safe—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Do I need to remind the House that I have to hear the member who has the floor? I think he's got more to say.

Start the clock. The member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: —back in clean, safe classrooms, in a stable, supported learning environment. But Speaker, let's be clear: That will not happen if the government continues to attack the charter rights of the lowest-paid education workers in this province, people trying to survive on \$39,000 a year. It's challenging for workers to give students all they can when they're having to work second jobs and go to the food bank to even put food on the table.

Speaker, we are experiencing the negative consequences of Bill 124, underpaying and disrespecting front-line health care workers in our health care system. So why would the government repeat the same mistakes in our education system?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We are absolutely committed to standing up to ensure kids remain in school.

Mr. Speaker, I will note to the member opposite that of education workers in this country, here in Ontario they are paid the highest: \$27 an hour. They have benefits. They have the best pension. They have 131 paid sick days, part of their sick leave. And as you know, Speaker, we continue to provide more investment in schools, more staffing—part of this contract has proposed 1,800 more workers—to ensure our kids are better supported.

What we will not accept is the idea of children being out of class for even one more day. They have paid the price of this pandemic, and we have a responsibility to ensure they stay in school in front of their educators, learning the skills they need to succeed in this economy.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, Bill 28 doesn't work for workers, doesn't work for students. If the government was serious about standing up for students, they would stand up for the people who care for those students. They would stand up for the people who go in each and every day, at very low pay, to ensure that our schools are safe, clean and that our students have extra education support.

I want to say to the parents of this province: If you want your students to be in safe, stable classrooms, with good learning environments, then the government needs to negotiate fair wages with the lowest-paid workers.

My question to the minister is: Why is the government refusing to negotiate in a reasonable, fair way with low-paid education workers asking for a few extra dollars an hour to be able to pay the bills?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: It is neither reasonable or fair to announce a strike on Friday when children have already been out of class. They've already been dealing with the pandemic and the strikes before that. That is unfair to children.

We believe, in our judgment, that kids should be in school. They should be in a stable, safe environment, supported by their staff and with their friends. That's why, Speaker, we've increased investment in public education. It's why we've offered a better deal, with 10% over four years while maintaining those benefits and pensions I spoke of earlier.

We are doing this because we want to get to a deal. It requires the union to withdraw the strike. It requires the union to bring forth a reasonable offer, not a nearly 33% increase in salary, nearly 50% increase in compensation when you add it all up. That is not reasonable to any observer.

We're going to continue to work hard and stand up for kids and keep them in schools, Speaker.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Ric Bresee: My question is for the Minister of Infrastructure.

Speaker, communities across eastern Ontario have been ignored for far too long under the previous Liberal

government when it came to providing access to reliable, high-speed Internet.

As a former IT guy and a former member of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, I am very aware of both the need and the efforts the local people have put into accessing broadband.

Residents and businesses rely on reliable Internet systems for their day-to-day work, for children to learn and for residents to communicate with people across the world, among many other things. For those in remote and rural communities, the continued lack of reliable Internet services prevents many from achieving their full economic potential.

Our government recently made an announcement highlighting the investments made in high-speed Internet infrastructure.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure please update the Legislature on how our government is closing the digital divide for all Ontarians, no matter where they live?

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Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you to the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington for the question.

We are allocating \$4 billion to connect every Ontarian to high-speed Internet by the end of 2025.

Last week, my parliamentary assistant, the member from Brampton West, joined the federal government to announce an investment of \$56 million towards high-speed Internet connectivity in eastern Ontario. Powered by Bell and Cogeco, these three projects will bring access to Birds Creek, Buckhorn and Bobcaygeon. Bell's projects are set to be completed by December 2025, and Cogeco's project is set to be completed by March 2024.

This investment in high-speed Internet means that 16,000 homes will now have access.

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

Mr. Ric Bresee: This is great news for families and businesses across eastern Ontario.

Access to reliable Internet should be a necessity, not a luxury. Unfortunately, this is still not the case for many Ontario families, including many of my constituents.

As the minister previously noted, our government has a plan to bring high-speed broadband access to every Ontarian by 2025.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure please explain how our government plans to close this gap and achieve the goal of 100% connectivity for all Ontarians, especially those in rural Ontario?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much for the question.

The member is correct; our government has made a commitment to bring high-speed Internet access to every Ontarian by the end of 2025. We have already invested over \$950 million towards nearly 190 high-speed Internet projects that have connected roughly 375,000 homes and businesses, which also include premises in eastern Ontario.

This summer, we announced the eight successful Internet service providers from the reverse auction process.

These eight ISPs are bringing access to up to 266,000 underserved and unserved homes and businesses within 339 municipalities.

We are now focusing on our last-mile strategy to close the digital divide, and we have 40,000 to 60,000 premises to go. We are almost there. Our government will get the job done.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier.

Yesterday, this Premier and his government decided to take away the bargaining rights of education workers who are amongst some of the lowest-paid unionized workers in Ontario. My office spoke with an education worker who called this action undemocratic and unfair.

Why are the Premier and his government refusing to respect workers' rights and bargain a fair collective agreement?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We respect our workers, which is why we're increasing their pay every year over the course of this contract—10% over four years—and maintaining benefits, sick leave and, of course, pensions, the gold standard in Canada. They are paid the highest in Canada, \$27 an hour on average. We're increasing their pay. We'll continue to do so because we know they play a critical role in our schools.

Part of our program is to hire 1,800 more education workers and roughly 800 to 900 more teachers. That's what we're doing because we know education quality is paramount and we know learning loss is real. We've expanded tutoring—\$175 million. We've hired more staff. We've expanded training.

None of this really matters unless these kids are in class. That's why we brought forward this legislation. Really, it's a last resort to ensure kids have the stability they deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: The last resort would have been bargaining until midnight on Thursday, when this agreement was up on Friday. That would have been the last resort. Education workers in this province deserve better from this government.

Investing in our educational workers means investing in our children's futures, because without them, our children are set up for failure. The education workers who are being disrespected by this government are the same workers who keep our schools clean and functioning properly. They need an environment that is safe, and without them, that can't happen.

Why does this Premier think that it's not important to invest in our children's futures?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We think it is important to stand up for students' futures, which is why we brought forward the bill today to keep them in school, because there's another threat of a strike that only one party made in this

province, and that's CUPE, on Sunday, when they announced the strike on Friday.

The member opposite suggested there's another way. Yes, of course, the government could have—as the New Democrats have, I guess, officially tabled as their position—not introduced legislation, hoped for the best on Thursday, and if the government of the day didn't acquiesce to a nearly 50% increase in compensation, there would have been a strike on Friday. How is that good for kids, for parents and for the communities that depend on our publicly funded schools?

We have done this as a last resort because, regrettably, the union wouldn't withdraw the strike for Friday, and we don't believe kids should be out of school. We believe these children have been through enough. Enough is enough. Parents know this to be true. We're standing up to provide the stability every child in the province deserves.

HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: My question is for the Minister of Health.

As we know, Ontario's health care system is in crisis. To be fair, health care has been in disaster mode for a long time, but you are the government of the day and it's up to you to fix it.

Speaker, this government must restore respect by scrapping Bill 124, a bill that continues to gut our system of nurses. It's time to clean up surgical backlogs by setting up stand-alone centres. I've spoken to many retired nurses who believe that returning to a two-year college nursing program would get more people on the front lines faster. That's part of a plan, and yet all I hear and see from this government on this file is tinkering.

Health care workers have lost faith in their profession and have left. They continue to leave, and others have been sidelined. I haven't seen any action with respect to enticing health care workers back to the front lines.

As we watch Ontario's hospitals bleed out, what does the minister have to say to those who have lost faith or who have been forced to watch from the sidelines?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm always happy to talk about our plans to stay open. It is a very important tenet of how we are making sure that our hospitals, our long-term care and our community care are working at full capacity so that they can look after the individuals who need help, where they need it, when they need it. We have worked very well with the College of Nurses of Ontario. In fact, we have over 1,000 new internationally educated RNs who are licensed and practising in the province of Ontario because of the changes our government has made.

The member opposite is right on one point, and that is that this file was ignored for far too long. We have Auditor General reports saying that we had a shortage of family physicians in northern Ontario. Did the government of the day do anything? No. It took Premier Ford, it took this government, to act and make the changes needed to make sure that our health care system is protected.

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

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Speaker, that response is a bit disappointing, because the member opposite should have said she will do everything possible to get every qualified worker back on the front lines. We need them all, and we need them today.

On Sunday night, one of my local hospitals, Norfolk General, issued a statement that effective immediately, services in the emergency department would be temporarily reduced. This is a staffing issue, and we're just at the beginning of cold and flu season. The release issued by the hospital said, "This temporary reduction in hours is necessary and is beyond the control of the hospital and the physicians in the community." This means the buck stops with the minister, with this government.

Over the past 36 hours, my constituents have been reaching out to me. They are worried that they are going to see more of these reductions in the coming weeks and months.

Will the minister stand up today and tell every qualified health care worker that she will do everything possible to get them all back to work in Haldimand-Norfolk and in all hospitals across Ontario to avoid further reductions and shutdowns?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: This question gives me an opportunity to highlight some of the things that have already occurred as we talk about short-term, medium-term and long-term goals.

We have, with our plan to stay open, added over 6,000 more health care workers, including nurses and personal support workers, to Ontario's health resource workforce. We will free up 2,500 hospital beds so that care is there for those who need it. And we will expand models of care that provide better, more appropriate care to avoid unnecessary visits to emergency departments.

There is no doubt that our government is seized with this issue—it is happening internationally across other countries, across Canadian jurisdictions—to make sure that we have sufficient health human resources. We're doing the work here in Ontario to make sure that people who want to practise and work in the health care system have that opportunity here in Ontario.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Trevor Jones: My question is for the Minister of Long-Term Care.

For years, the Liberal government, propped up by the NDP, neglected our seniors living in long-term care. The Liberals received countless reports, including the Sharkey report, which called for increased direct care hours for residents. Despite this, between 2009 and 2018, they only increased care by an average of two minutes per year, leaving our seniors well below the recommended four hours of daily care.

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Speaker, what is our government doing to improve care for seniors?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington for the question.

This government has listened to the advice of health care experts. We are increasing care year over year and ensuring long-term-care residents receive an average of four hours of care per day by March 2025; this is up from two and a half hours in 2018. To meet this target, we are providing \$4.9 billion in funding over four years, which will help homes hire 27,000 new nurses and personal support workers—27,000.

Improving staffing is one of our three key pillars for fixing long-term care, and we are making historic investments to ensure our long-term-care residents receive the care they deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the member for responding.

Our government recently announced the Hiring More Nurse Practitioners for Long-Term Care program. The announcement noted that our government would commit \$57 million over three years to recruit and retain up to 225 additional nurse practitioners for the long-term-care sector.

Can the minister explain the role of nurse practitioners and how this will impact the operation of long-term-care homes across the province? Further, can the minister elaborate further on what support we'll provide to remote and rural communities with less access to health care workers?

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the member again for the question.

I'm a big fan of nurse practitioners, and I believe they're a big answer to relieving some of the strains on our health care system. Their scope includes diagnosing conditions, ordering tests and prescribing medications, developing comprehensive care plans, and making referrals when required. Those are just some of the things within their scope.

Through this program, homes can request funding for eligible employment expenses, including salaries, benefits and overhead costs for newly hired nurse practitioners. This is an important step toward enhancing the quality of care in long-term-care homes.

Nurse practitioners are part of a health care team that develops, supports, implements and evaluates residents' care plans. They also provide mentorship to other staff, enhancing their knowledge and abilities.

We also recognize that rural communities may have trouble accessing much-needed health care professionals, which is why this funding also provides up to \$5,000 to help nurse practitioners relocate.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the Premier.

Education workers are early childhood educators and educational assistants, custodians and administrators. Schools literally wouldn't function without them. Tens of thousands of women and men who do these jobs every day are the lowest-paid workers in our education system. They show up every day and work hard so our children can have the best education possible.

The Premier always talks about being there for the little guy. He talks about how he's always working for workers. My question is, how about putting all of that talk into action?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we are acting to keep kids in school. That's why we brought forth a bill today to do that in response to CUPE's decision to strike on Friday, which we think is really regrettable and, frankly, unfair to these kids, who have been through so much difficulty.

We do agree with the member that we value these workers. It's why, in this contract, we're suggesting and proposing up to 10% over four years in increase to their pay and benefits, and maintaining their pension program and 131 days of sick leave. We've done this deliberately because we recognize the critical role they play in our schools.

We're going to be hiring 1,800 more education workers and up to 1,800 more teachers in our schools to support our kids.

While we increase funding and increase staffing in our schools, the first principle of helping these kids catch up, really, is that they've got to be in school, Friday and every day. That's why we brought this bill in reaction to CUPE's decision to strike, and we hope they will withdraw this needless and unfair strike on children and return to work with government to get a better deal, a better way that respects all players but keeps these kids in the classroom.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Back to the Premier: The previous Liberal government tried imposing contracts on workers before with Bill 115. The courts ruled that violated the charter rights of teachers, and the government was required to pay over \$200 million in penalties.

We know what will happen after this government imposes contracts on education workers. They will be taken to court, which they will fight with tax dollars, and then they will lose and have to pay huge penalties. That's not fiscally responsible.

Why is the Premier wasting tax dollars in the courts instead of paying education workers what they are worth?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, we're increasing investments in public education by \$680 million. We've announced Ontario's Plan to Catch Up, which has over \$175 million of tutoring—

Interjection: Online.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We've increased staffing in the province of Ontario—no, it's in person, in fact, with small groups under five, on average, in every school board in the

province of Ontario. And we extended it next year because we think that is so critical, because learning loss is a root cause—really created by disruption, by kids being out of school and impacted by pandemics or strikes or other difficulty.

Mr. Speaker, we want to see none of that transpire. We want these kids to stay in school, to stay calm and focused on learning, and to not be impacted by needless disruption, when one puts their own interest ahead of the collective interest of kids.

We are going to fight hard to keep kids in school, and we hope the members opposite will join us in supporting stability for all children in the province of Ontario.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Riddell: Speaker, I am pleased to welcome the Egg Farmers of Ontario, who have joined us here today. Because of the sacrifice and hard work of nearly 500 egg farm families in Ontario, they provide up to half the eggs sold in Canada—an amazing feat.

Our agri-food sector is a vital industry for our province and for the country's economic future. Unfortunately, many of these farmers require more support due to the need for greater access to ag technology. For Ontario farmers to grow and become more efficient, they need a provincial government that understands the value of investing in agri-tech innovation.

Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs please tell the House about the targeted investments our government is making to get the latest ag technology into the hands of our farmers?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much to the member opposite from Cambridge for that question.

I want to share with you, Speaker, that through the leadership of Premier Ford and the commitment of our government, some of the most advanced agri-food research around the world is happening right here in Ontario. We are investing in research stations positioned strategically throughout the province, like in Emo, in northwestern Ontario, where they're seeing if a crop of hops can grow. We have research stations that farmers and government alike are partnering on, like we have in Elora. We also are investing \$7 million in over 50 Ontario-led research projects facilitated through institutions like the University of Guelph, focused on environmental stewardship, animal and plant health, as well as rural economic development.

We have greenhouse growers developing initiatives that are going to see net-zero energy greenhouses. We're putting digital soil-mapping into the hands of farmers. And, Speaker, we are also bringing agri-tech forward with the adoption of new innovations, automation and robotics.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Brian Riddell: Speaker, unfortunately many farmers were not supported by the previous Liberal government when responding to the needs of our agricultural sector. This is why our government must take immediate

action and correct this. Roughly one in 10 jobs in the province is connected to the farming and agri-food sector.

There is no denying that this has been a challenging year for farmers. Global supply chains have been disrupted and continue to impact the inputs they rely on.

Can the minister please tell the House how our government supports innovation and solutions to strengthen agri-food supply chains through this new technology?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: There's no denying that the supply chain challenges over the last couple of years have ultimately put farmers in a precarious situation.

But, again, Speaker, under the vision of Premier Ford, doors for new, innovative, made-in-Ontario solutions have been opened. And I'm pleased to share with you an example that really has hit home, because we're wanting to inspire and invite and incentivize companies to invest in Ontario for Ontario-led solutions, like the fertilizer challenge that we opened up. We're inviting people to bring forward ideas to introduce new opportunities for fertilizer that has been made right here in Ontario.

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When we come up with alternatives like fertilizer solutions right here in this province of Ontario, our farmers will be the early adopters. And what does that generate? It generates consumer confidence in their food source—nutritious, delicious, grown right here, close at home.

Speaker, in closing, I want to share with you that it is our government that's standing shoulder to shoulder with our farmers, with our food processors and with our innovators to make sure we're leading-edge and everyone—

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

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is to the Premier.

A good society makes sure that kids have every advantage. Rather than enhancing young Ontarians' education through investment, this government is admitting failure, and it's changing the rules because they can't negotiate a fair deal. This government is teaching children that being fair is optional.

What is this government thinking about their impact on teaching children about ethics and values?

This government wants to distract people from realizing they pay educational support workers around minimum wage—minimum wages for those who look after our children. When will this government enhance education, listen to workers and finally pay them what they're worth?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Yet again another question without any concern for kids.

The strike is on Friday, which is really regrettable and, frankly, unacceptable to parents—and to children—across the province, who want to see stability for their children.

We believe kids should be in school. We offered the union an off-ramp to avert a strike—by meeting on Sunday, to withdraw the strike notice that will impact two million kids this Friday—but they rejected that. They continue on their path to strike. That is really unfair to so many kids who have been through so much. So we brought forth legislation that is before the House. We encourage the member opposite to vote for it on the basis that children in London and in every region of this province deserve to be in class.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is back to the Premier: It's no surprise that the Minister of Education really could not talk to the moral and ethical accountability of this government in not abiding with fairness in negotiation. They talk about their good business acumen, yet they can't negotiate; they can't close a deal. They have to bring a hammer when they don't actually need one.

Children know when someone is being manipulative and unfair. They also know what it's like when someone is being a bully.

Listen to the front lines, the people who care for our children. As ECE Janna wrote to me, "Multiple class evacuations disrupt our days and learning. Our school has five EAs running around with their heads chopped off through the whole school. The system is breaking.... Staff can't afford to stay and will leave" because of "Lecce and Ford's decision to mandate legislation."

Is this government going to keep strangling the education system through cuts, underfunding and neglect, or will they show that children are important by paying education support workers what they deserve and truly investing in public education?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to remind members that even when they're quoting from a document, it would be preferable if they would refer to ministers by their ministerial title or to members by their riding.

Response?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We believe that kids in this province should be in school. We know it is in their best interest that they're there on Friday and every day throughout the school year, without interruption. And we believe, as Progressive Conservatives, on behalf of the families we represent, that their kids should be in school

without disruption. They should not have to be the casualty of a debate, nor should they have to stay home because of, in this case, CUPE's desire to increase compensation by such an astronomical amount and to not withdraw their decision to strike on Friday. That will affect millions of people—the working parents in our communities and the most vulnerable among us. We have an obligation to them to work together to keep them in school. It's why we've offered the union a higher increase in compensation: 10% over four years. It's why we're going to hire more staff, support their benefits and their pensions.

But the most important principle of our strategy is keeping kids in classrooms.

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

McMASTER UNIVERSITY RECEPTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: I want to invite everyone—McMaster University is having a reception in room 228-230. Everyone is welcome, staff included.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member from Scarborough Southwest on a point of order.

Ms. Doly Begum: I would like to take a moment to introduce two special guests to the House. Today, page captain Julie Harrop's parents are here. Sabrina Aziz and Chris Harrop are here. Please welcome them to the House.

MESSAGES OF SUPPORT

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Speaker, I want to thank everybody in the House who has reached out to myself and my family. Your kind words, your cards, your showing of support truly have meant a lot, and we appreciate it.

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

The House recessed from 1156 to 1300.

Afternoon meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott

Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Valerie Quioc Lim, Wai Lam (William) Wong,

Meghan Stenson, Christopher Tyrell

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
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barnes, Patrice (PC)	Ajax	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough- Sud-Ouest	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Bowman, Stephanie (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Brady, Bobbi Ann (IND)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Bresee, Ric (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Byers, Rick (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée 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, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
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
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
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
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	
Flack, Rob (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	

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 Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Michael D. (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Jones, Trevor (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karpoche, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	
Kerzner, Hon. / L'hon. Michael S. (PC)	York Centre / York-Centre	Solicitor General / Solliciteur général
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Todd J. (PC)	Durham	
McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
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
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associé du Logement
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-présidente et présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
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
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	