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of Ontario



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(Hansard)**

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Jeudi  
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Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott  
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott  
Greffier : Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 2 March 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 2 mars 2023

*The House met at 0900.*

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

*Prières.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Next we'll have a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

REDUCING INEFFICIENCIES ACT  
(INFRASTRUCTURE STATUTE LAW  
AMENDMENTS), 2023

LOI DE 2023 SUR LA RÉDUCTION  
DES INEFFICACITÉS (MODIFIANT  
DES LOIS SUR LES INFRASTRUCTURES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 1, 2023, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 69, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to infrastructure / Projet de loi 69, Loi modifiant diverses lois sur les infrastructures.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** When we last debated Bill 69, I understand the member for Essex had made his presentation. Now we'll turn to questions to the member for Essex.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** To the member from Essex: I was able to listen to the tail end of his comments yesterday. The government has—there's a long, long list of transgressions against the environment, everything from gutting conservation authorities to a tax on the greenbelt. So when the government comes forward with a bill and they really don't communicate anything to the opposition and there's no real opportunity for us to learn the intent behind the legislation, why should we trust this government with anything that they have to say about the environment?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Thank you for the question. As we learned throughout the very lengthy speeches made yesterday by the various members of this assembly—there were various commentaries made by the Minister of Infrastructure, who laid out the details of the bill and explained how it would operate. Other members spoke, both on the government side and on the opposition side, laying out the details of the bill and explaining how it works. I, myself, took the impromptu opportunity to lay out the typical process of an environmental assessment as was my experience through being elected on a municipal government for six years. We all understood, from all of the presentations that were made from the various members of this chamber, that the standard environmental process can be very long

and invite all sorts of public commentary. The public commentary, of course, is very important and desired and proper and good. That's why an environmental process is open to public comment. That was the process that we discussed. That is, of course, the main—or, at least, one of the main—subjects of the subject bill in front of us today.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions?

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Thank you to the member from Essex for passionately talking about this bill. I was enjoying your presentation yesterday.

The EA process is not being compromised. The proposed legislative amendments are minor and won't have any impact on the existing EA class, environmental protection.

My question to you: How is this government keeping the environment top of mind while reducing inefficiencies?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I'd like to thank the member from Markham–Thornhill for that question. As it was showing, he had listened to the comments that were made throughout the period of the speech-making, and he was obviously doing his homework. That's why he's able to ask this question today.

As we have observed throughout the discussion of this entire bill, there is 100% opportunity for the public to comment during the process of an environmental assessment. That is 100% preserved. It is 100% preserved throughout the entire period, the lengthy period, that we discussed and that I described yesterday in my comments. Municipalities will still have to go through these processes and will still have to have public input. They will still have to go through the environmental assessment process, but we're only talking about one very brief little skipping moment which might occur from time to time.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for London West.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I listened yesterday to the remarks from the member for Essex. I noticed that he repeated some of the claims that were made in the government's press release accompanying this legislation. The government stated that the purpose of the legislation is to address the 2017 Auditor General's report on Infrastructure Ontario real estate services. So I looked at the 2017 Auditor General's report on real estate services, and never once in that report did I see anything about consolidating these 14 properties under the auspices of Infrastructure Ontario. In fact, what the report did was criticize Infrastructure Ontario's poor oversight of the contracts that it was managing. So can the member explain how exactly this legislation addresses the 2017 Auditor General's report?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I thank the member from London West for that question. I've had the opportunity to visit the city of London many times, for three years when I was studying for my law degree in the city of London. It's an awesome city, a great shopping city.

With regard to the question about touching upon the Auditor General's report, of course, we all know that one of the main functions of the Auditor General is to find efficiencies to decrease inefficiency. That is the original and primary function of an Auditor General, I would submit. That's my opinion. And what is the name of this act? It's the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, which coincides directly with the primary function of having an Auditor General. So in my submission, this is exactly the kind of act that would be welcomed by the Auditor General, reducing inefficiencies—or I might put it another way: increasing efficiencies. I'm thinking that when the Auditor General sees that we're reducing inefficiencies, the Auditor General would be very happy about that, because reducing inefficiencies, which is what this act does, saves taxpayers money. And I would hope that we would all agree, all 124 of us, that saving taxpayers' money is a good thing. But interestingly enough, when I put that question to the member from London North Centre last night, he didn't really give me an answer to that. I asked him: Isn't it a good thing? He didn't answer. I think it's a good thing. Let's do it.

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

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I'd like to ask a question. He talked about saving money and taxpayers' money. Why do you continue to support P3s? I gave an example yesterday and nobody answered it. When we built the Peterborough hospital with public funds, it cost about \$350 million; when you built the St. Catharines hospital, it cost \$1.1 billion. One was done with public funds, almost the exact same hospital; one was done with a P3. So if you want to save money, why are you not addressing the P3s and how much more they're costing taxpayers over and over again?

0910

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I thank the member for that question. I'd like to take this very brief opportunity to wish him a happy 27th wedding anniversary, as he mentioned it the other day. And now, answering his question--

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Remember, she's Italian.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** A De Luca from the De Luca family. I remembered that he married into the De Luca family, and I expressed the very heartfelt warmth and happy thought that being part of the De Lucas is a good thing.

Getting back to the question on building hospitals: There are several ways of building hospitals, and one is to put 100% of the cost on the shoulders of the taxpayer. That's one way to do it. Another way to do it is to seek partners and perhaps shift some of that cost burden onto a non-government agency—and “non-government,” of course, means a “non-taxpayer” agency. So there are several ways to do these things, and several of these experiments and some of these have been tried over the years. There are a

lot of government projects and non-government projects and hybrid government/non-government projects that have been tried over the various decades.

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

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** My question to the member from Essex: How will the centralization of real estate under these agencies help the government achieve its priorities?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I thank the member for that question. He's doing an excellent job of chairing the Standing Committee on the Interior.

To his question: Centralizing the decision-making authority for real estate is actually a very good idea. As I stated in my impromptu remarks yesterday night, there are currently, to my surprise, at least 14 various agencies that are juggling real estate files for the government right now. I suspect that there are actually more than 14, but perhaps the Auditor General might have something to say about that. To have 14 different agencies juggling real estate files all at the same time is inefficient, so we are going to reduce that inefficiency by putting them all under one authority, which will now have the ability to fill empty spaces and move oversubscribed spaces over to empty spaces. That will be a good thing, because it will, as the title of the act says, reduce inefficiency and, consequently, save the taxpayer money. Of course, I have absolutely no hesitation whatsoever in saying that all 124 of us should be looking for ways to save taxpayer money.

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

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** It's always an honour to rise in this House to represent the people of my good riding.

We here are members of His Majesty's loyal opposition, and I am the official opposition critic for the environment, and we all take that responsibility and that role very, very seriously.

I have to say, as the critic for the environment, it has been a really demoralizing few years under this government—and not just for me, but for the people of Ontario. We have seen, in the last few years, under this government and under this minister—we have seen a minister preside over what we can only describe as the greatest assault on our public natural spaces, our green spaces, our natural heritage, our wetlands, our wildlife. It is something that has been unprecedented in the history of Ontario, and it begs the question as to why he's even called the Minister of the Environment.

People in my riding and across Ontario are feeling nothing but despair. Young people who expected a government to protect their natural heritage, to protect what should have been a legacy handed to them from those of us who are entrusted to protect that, see nothing but a bleak future when it comes to our natural world.

There's a real running tally, a real rogues' gallery, if you will, of the things that have happened in this province under the nose of the Minister of the Environment. We have seen the loss of protection for our conservation lands, with this government kneecapping agencies that were once charged with protecting our wetlands. In fact, it's unbelievable to think that this government, rather than protecting provincially significant wetlands, has chosen to



charge conservation authorities—not only have they taken away their ability to protect these wetlands, but they've actually charged them with the task of finding land that is under their protection for development. This is unbelievable. The conservation authorities now are playing a role in delivering up more of our protected, provincially significant wetlands for development.

Not only have they changed the role of the oversight body, the conservation authority, we've also seen loss of protection for our wetlands because this government is in the process of declassifying provincially significant wetlands. For those of you who don't—I'm sure many of you do understand, but it cannot be said often enough that wetlands are significant in protecting not just our natural heritage, but they're significant in protecting our communities, our towns, our infrastructure from flooding. So wetlands are not just something that's a bother that this government seems to see as in the way of development, but they're something that's a significant, important part of our natural landscape.

We have seen this government's complete disregard, or complete disrespect, of the role of wetlands in conservation authorities, and clearly in the member from Oshawa's neck of the woods. This government gave permission to pave over a wetland, in the case of Duffins Creek. Clearly, they don't understand or they don't care about the role of wetlands when it comes to protecting not only our environment but protecting communities from flooding.

We've seen the loss of protection for our wildlife species and their habitat with the watering down of the species-at-risk act. We're talking about animals and habitat that we all love. We're talking about the monarch butterfly. We're talking about bald eagles. We're talking about things that make us proud to be in Ontario, to call Ontario such a beautiful place for us to live and grow. Our habitat, our natural species are part of that. And we have a government that, instead of protecting these wildlife species, is watering down their protection. This government introduced essentially a pay-to-slay provision that would allow destruction of the species' habitats, or species, and that's okay as long as the person or the entity that is doing this destruction pays a fine. That fine goes into a fund that really has no connection to restoring the actual area that was destroyed. Who knows how that money will be spent? That is cold comfort, to know that the habitat of one of these species has been destroyed or damaged, with no provision to restore it in any way.

Can we talk about climate change? Because we've absolutely seen no progress to address climate change. In fact, under this minister, the carbon pollution in our province continues to get much worse. They do not have a credible climate plan. Their made-in-Ontario plan, really, is just a pamphlet. So we have a government that either doesn't believe in climate change or doesn't care about the impacts it will have on future generations.

We continue to see in this province water bottlers, big multinational corporations like Nestlé and like BlueTriton, continue to be given a licence to drain our aquifers for pennies. It's pennies on the litre. In fact, these companies

that are profiting from our water and our waterways pay less in fees than it costs this government to oversee and manage this. Why do we have a government that doesn't understand that we think that large corporations shouldn't be profiting off of our natural resources, which is water, and for it to be sold for a profit when the people of the province of Ontario have to pay those costs? Municipalities that do not have access to good groundwater—it impinges on their ability to grow. But companies are profiting, with no obligation to make whole these municipalities and those communities that are suffering from that.

**0920**

And then I guess we have—I would like to say this is the mother of all, but we'll get to the greenbelt. But we have Highway 413. As we know, this government is really ramming through this super-sprawl highway that we all know will pave over farmlands and wetlands. It will continue the carve-up of the greenbelt and, again, destroy the habitat of many, many more species at risk.

I just have to wonder—this government has decided that they're going to look at a new biodiversity strategy. If you're not aware of this, the government is looking for comment at their committee on the status of species at risk. My suspicion is that this is not to add species at risk to the list. My suspicion is that it will, again, be a diminishing of the protection for species at risk, and I can only suspect—only suspect, with the lack of transparency of this government—that this may be in anticipation of building a highway in habitats for species at risk, and if we take these species off the list, the government is under no obligation to protect them. That is something that remains to be seen, but given the current track record of this government, it'd be hard to think otherwise.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** The member for Oakville?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Point of order, Madam Speaker. I just want to remind the speaker and the member to stick to the content. I believe we are discussing Bill 69.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I'll let her continue on her train.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

So yes, to be clear: We are talking about Bill 69, which has a significant schedule that will diminish the environmental assessment process in the province, which has a direct negative impact on the environment, as I'm discussing.

Highway 413: We know that it will go through some of Ontario's last remaining areas of countryside. It will require cutting down a forest. It will continue to threaten our precious agricultural land. We have class 1 farmland that we're losing at a rate of—I think it's 379 acres a day. When I say that, I can hardly believe that that's the figure—I think it is—because it's so astronomical. But this Highway 413 further threatens the land on which we grow food.

So it's quite clear that this highway is a potential looming environmental disaster, but I think we need to make no mistake that it is also a potential financial disaster as well. Estimates say that this highway could cost anywhere between \$10 billion and \$12 billion in taxpayers' money. That's a lot of money with not a lot of information from

this government, and I just think, to put that in context—we're having our budget coming up March 31, I believe. The government is going to present its fiscal plan for 2023. But if we look at where we are now, this is a government that's sitting on \$400 billion in debt. That's the debt of the province of Ontario currently.

**Interjection:** How much?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** It's \$400 billion. It's astronomical. They talk about being fiscally prudent, but under this government's management, this debt has only continued to grow.

We also, as a measure of fiscal responsibility, look at the debt to GDP. I remember Minister Fedeli being outraged when, under the Liberals, the debt-to-GDP ratio went to 40%. We now have a government that has a debt-to-GDP ratio of about 43% and climbing. So by any measure, Highway 413 is not fiscally prudent, nor, I would suggest, is this government as fiscally prudent as they like to claim.

Then we come to the greenbelt and what has been described as the carving up, the selling off of the greenbelt. The outrage over this is about the environment. It's about what's at risk and what we stand to lose when it comes to our natural heritage, when it comes to farmland. All of this is something that we understand. When we hear just the name "greenbelt," we know that this is something that we should be protecting and preserving.

But I think the absolute outrage for people comes from the fact that the Premier promised many times to protect the greenbelt, that he would not open the greenbelt up for development. And what we see is a string of broken promises. The people of the province feel betrayed. They feel betrayed that what they expected would be protected by this government has essentially been divvied up. And it would appear it has been divvied up not to benefit the people of the province of Ontario but to profit select powerful developers in the province of Ontario. I'm not just making that up; it's a matter of public record that the big developers that own land in this greenbelt are also clearly connected, either through employment, through appointments or through donations, to the PC Party.

So that's the kind of cynicism that is not good for Ontario. I would suggest that people expect so much better from their government, not only to protect their environment but to be straight up when it comes to how you're selling off our heritage. I think people feel that the government needs to hear this: This is not your land. This does not belong to the Ministry of the Environment. It doesn't belong to this government to sell to its friends. This land is public, and it should be protected as such. It's a jewel, and we should be protecting it and not selling it off—for pennies, really. The cynicism runs so deep.

I have a question. I'm hoping that the Minister of the Environment will speak to this bill. We have not heard the Minister of the Environment stand up to speak to this bill that has such a significant impact on the environment. When and if the minister speaks to this, my question to him would be around the greenbelt: When did this minister himself know that the greenbelt was going to be open for

development? It would be interesting to know the timing of that as well.

With this list, I have to say, with all due respect, the government has not shown that they are forthcoming or trustworthy when it comes to the environment or our natural heritage. In fact, they've just given us many reasons not to trust them. So I think the government should understand why no one in the province believes anything that you say or what you're doing when it comes to the environment.

Specifically to the bill, Madam Speaker, in this bill, we have a schedule that will again address and make diminishing changes to the Environmental Bill of Rights. People need to understand in the province that we have a bill of rights. It's a right that we all have as Ontarians. It's the Environmental Bill of Rights. This is a legal right that's enshrined in provincial laws, similar to us having access to government information, similar to the right for us to have safe and healthy workplaces and to the right of Indigenous communities to be consulted—free and fair, prior consent. The Environmental Bill of Rights is one of those sets of laws. In the Environmental Bill of Rights, this recognizes that we have a shared and common value in Ontario to protect, conserve and restore the environment "for the benefit of present and future generations." That just sounds so lovely, and I think that's what we should all be doing. In fact, what we have seen is the Environmental Bill of Rights continue to be watered down, chipped away—and I guess we'd call it death by a thousand cuts—with this government.

In fact, I'll go on to show that this government has been proven to have broken the law, violated the rights of the people of the province of Ontario, under the Environmental Bill of Rights. I think it's important to note at this point that the actual mechanisms by which you access your rights under this bill are that the government needs to notify and consult the public through a website called the Environmental Registry. For those of you who don't know this, it's called the ERO, the Environmental Registry of Ontario. That's where the government posts—or should be posting—things that will have a significant impact on the environment. That is an important right we need to protect and that we need to continue to utilize.

The whole idea of the environmental assessment is so that we look before we leap, when things are being proposed that will impact the environment that we have a transparent public consultation process, that we allow experts in their community to weigh in on things that will impact them. But apparently, this government finds that this law is just too burdensome for them. They call it burdensome. They say it's red tape, but it's your right that they are considering to be a burden.

**0930**

In fact, with the Bradford Bypass, another highway that has the potential to impose significant damage to our environment, the government has chosen to exempt themselves from any environmental assessment.

So it's quite clear that this is a government that does not want scrutiny, that doesn't want the public to weigh in on

the environment, and that they think they know best when it comes to our environment.

Again, we have the Auditor General to thank for the independent research that she does, the oversight that she provides to all of us in this House to do our job better, to understand the role of the government and how the government is performing on our behalf. We use this, as the official opposition, to inform the government, which is our role—to give them information that we believe will help make their bills better. We rely heavily on the Auditor General, as we believe the government should.

Unfortunately, the government has racked up a litany of failures when it comes to the Environmental Bill of Rights and when it comes to environmental assessment.

In her latest report of 2022, the Auditor General said that even though required under the Environmental Bill of Rights Act, the environment ministry did not provide educational programs to Ontarians about their rights. They don't want you to know about your rights. They didn't notify Ontarians promptly in over half of the leave-to-appeal applications. The environment minister could not provide documentation of internal controls—and many of the ministers did not follow internal procedures. The environment minister was not proactive in ensuring that environmentally significant decisions were made subject to the EBR act, the Environmental Bill of Rights.

It has been shown over and over again that this government has violated—a court has found, the Auditor General has found that this government does not seem to think that the Environmental Bill of Rights is something that they should be adhering to.

So what we see before us is a bill—we've seen that they have ignored the right under environmental assessment because it's burdensome. Because they've broken the law and they don't want to follow it, what we now have is a bill that changes the law, so there are no longer any requirements to follow some of the provisions. This is a continuing decline, I would say, of what we've seen in this province.

I'm disappointed to see that rather than protecting the environment, we have a minister, we have a government that have shown a limitless weakness to bend to the will of big development at every turn. Rather than sustainable growth, we have a government that is handing over our natural heritage.

I pledge to continue to stand with the people who stand for the environment. We will not stop. We will stand to make sure that our natural heritage is protected, because clearly, this is what the people of Ontario expect for us and—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Questions and answers?

**Mr. Todd J. McCarthy:** Speaker, since 2018, the Progressive Conservative government of Premier Doug Ford has been focused on building Ontario. We built schools. The previous Liberal-NDP coalition closed schools down. We are building hospitals, in contrast to the Liberal-NDP coalition that brought our health care system to its knees.

We are building transit, with four new transit lines in the GTA, and the NDP said no to that.

Bill 69 will help predictable infrastructure projects—and let us build infrastructure faster without compromising the EA process.

Speaker, the opposition supported Bill 63. Why will the opposition not support Bill 69 and build infrastructure for the people of Ontario that they need and deserve?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** We do not want to see what this government is trying to do, which is drag us back to the 1970s when it comes to environmental protections, when basically it was the Wild West, where anything was allowed and the people of the province had absolutely no input on things that would impact their communities.

I think the people of the province of Ontario need to know that what we're talking about is those little woodlots that are near your neighbourhood, the place where you walk your dog, those streams that you like and you don't realize—were environmentally significant, protected—are no longer protected.

We absolutely will not vote for a bill that takes away people's rights and does not take into consideration the things we need to do for sustainable ecological growth.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Thank you to the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for her presentation.

During the pandemic, the conservation areas in my region, in Thunder Bay–Superior North, were the mental and physical lifelines that helped people get through the pandemic. They are beloved spaces, and I can't see anybody wanting to give them up.

Is it your sense that the incredibly beautiful conservation areas in your region—I'm thinking of Webster Falls, for example, a stunning place. Do you believe that people in your region would be happy to see these conservation areas turned into housing developments without any consultation from local organizations?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you for the question.

That's what we're talking about. We're talking about these natural spaces that people love and frequent and that are so good for our mental health and our mental well-being, but also just for the health of our province.

It's really disappointing to see that the government has gutted conservation authorities to speed up development. I think people will be shocked to find what they're going to lose—I think even the way that the Niagara Escarpment Commission has been taken out of the ability to preserve land, right into the fact that the conservation authorities no longer can consider pollution or conservation of land as part of their job to protect our environment. So, yes, I think people would be shocked to see what this province looks like once these kinds of laws go through.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** I want to thank the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas for the remarks.

On Tuesday night, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers had a reception here. Two members, Dan Cozzi

of the Municipal Engineers Association and Chris Traini, county engineer for Middlesex county, made a beeline for me and expressed their frustration with the province's environmental assessment process. It's in dire need of modernization and simplification, I know all too well—because I've led many of these in my own professional career.

My question to the member is—why the red tape that is anticipated to be removed with this bill is worse off for Ontario versus what the municipalities would like to see.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you to the member for the question.

I believe that the member will understand the severity of impacting wetlands. It seems to me that in your very own community, you have had not one but maybe two once-in-a-century storms that have resulted in loss of property, property damage, people's homes being damaged, major flooding. And it's my understanding that people can't even get insurance for some of their homes. So why would you consider protecting people's homes and protecting flood lands red tape? It's your job to protect people and protect their homes and protect their financial health, not to eliminate those protections.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I wasn't going to go there, but seeing as this member continues to mislead this House, you will remember, Speaker, extremely well—

*Interjections.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I will ask the member to withdraw.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Yes, I retract.

You will remember this, Speaker, because I know I was there with you, quite frankly, in Hamilton. When you want to talk about closing schools and closing hospitals—Mike Harris closed more schools and more hospitals than anybody in the province of Ontario. And you'll remember this because you were the reporter: There were 100,000 teachers and other unions marching in Hamilton to try to protect their jobs and stop the closures of schools and hospitals in the province of Ontario.

So when you stand up and talk about coalitions—I've got to have a question for her. My question is, why do you think they want to build 1.5 million homes and attack the greenbelt, when we know we can build two million homes without touching the greenbelt today—and that was a report that came out two days ago.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Well, I think that if you've given me an opening to talk about the Conservative legacy under Mike Harris and this rush to eliminate protections when it comes to flooding and it comes to the environment—it has a direct DNA link to the Mike Harris years, and I need to go no further than to talk about Walkerton. This is a government that deregulated, decentralized protections for people when it came to drinking water. They probably called it red tape then. They probably said that this was burdensome and this was costly. What resulted was the loss of lives. How many people lost their lives? Quite a significant number. People then lived for years and years after

that with debilitating illness. So when you call protections burdensome, you have to look at your own legacy.

**0940**

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** As we are discussing this bill, we are crystal clear that this bill will make the government fiscally prudent and make sure that we save taxpayers' dollars. And when it comes to the environmental standards, it will be in place and there's no compromise on the environmental assessments or the protections.

It's very crystal clear: They will enable the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to waive the 30-day waiting period after the successful completion of an environmental assessment if there are no other outstanding concerns.

My question is, why does the NDP want to slow down government and not want to save taxpayers' dollars?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you to the member for the question. With all due respect, nobody trusts this government and has no reason to trust this government when it comes to the environment and when it comes to the greenbelt. Everything that this government has said about protecting the greenbelt has been malarkey to this point. So why should we trust you now?

And so you're saying to me that this bill will have no impact on environmental protections? Show me the evidence of what you've done so far, because your track record is absolutely abysmal. No one trusts you and no one has any reason to.

And so I say that we need to move forward on sustainable development, but we need a government we can trust and we don't have one right now.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** I appreciate my colleague from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas mentioning the flooding that has happened: again, two once-in-100-year storms where people lost significant property and personal valuables. And for many right now, either their insurance rates have gone up or they can't get flooding insurance at all in Windsor, and we know that Windsor needs support with infrastructure.

I'm wondering if the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas could build and speak a little more about the importance of environmental protections. I know the member opposite from the Conservatives talked about savings for the taxpayers, but the reality is, when you don't protect the environment, when you're building homes in flood plains, that is a cost to homeowners. And there's environmental costs as well. So I'm wondering if the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas could build on that conversation.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Response? You've got 30 seconds.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Absolutely. Not only has this government left individual homeowners holding the bag when it comes to the cost to repair their flooded basements, to repair their flooded land, to pay for increased insurance

premiums—this government has left you on your own. They're also leaving municipalities out on their own. Municipalities have to pay the cost of infrastructure, roads, bridges that are eroding, culverts all across this province, and this government is not providing the municipalities the money they need—taxpayers will.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I rise to speak on Bill 69, and since my time is limited, I'm going to focus my remarks on schedule 1, which, if passed, would give the minister the power to waive or alter the 30-day comment period following the public comment period.

Speaker, let's be clear about what this says. It says that you, the people of Ontario, have the right to comment on the possible harms and damage of a particular project. And let's say the deadline for that is March 31. On April 1, the minister can simply say, "We don't care what you say. We're going to ignore it. We're going to not even consider your comments over the next 30 days and proceed with the project anyway."

The government wants us to believe that, on its own, this is a minor step that will do little to affect the EA process. But Speaker, what it really is is another step in a risky and reckless trend towards dismantling environmental protections that directly affect people's lives, livelihoods, property, businesses and community infrastructure.

The Environmental Assessment Act was brought in in 1975 for a reason: to do risk assessment on development projects before blindly proceeding with a project that could result in serious harm or subject us to significant risk or cost.

Speaker, I was taught when I was a kid to always look before I leap, because it's a way to prevent yourself from injuring yourself and it's a way to prevent yourself from experiencing significant harms or costs, but the government doesn't seem to understand this. Instead, the government has spent the last five years systematically dismantling legislation that helps us look before we leap, that helps us reduce the cost and harms of environmental damage. This makes absolutely no sense at a time when the frequency and severity of climate-fuelled extreme weather events are on the rise. The FAO alone estimates that the risk to public infrastructure just over the next seven years is \$26.2 billion a year.

So why would we dismantle the ability of conservation authorities to protect us from flooding and protect our drinking water? Why did the government weaken the environmental assessment process through Bill 197 a few years ago? Why did they gut the Endangered Species Act, bringing in pay-to-slay provisions? Why are they opening the greenbelt for development, paving over the farmland that feeds us and the wetlands that protect us from flooding, at a time when the risk, the cost and the harms are on the rise?

If the government truly wants to modernize the environmental assessment process, then why not improve it? Why not improve it instead of weaken it? Why not expand it to include private sector projects that cause harm, as well?

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It's now time for questions and answers.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** I just want to be crystal clear in this House that the environmental assessment standards will definitely remain in place, including that this bill will not compromise assessing potential environmental impacts. It will not jeopardize identifying mitigation measures. It will not jeopardize any consultation with Indigenous communities, the public, stakeholders. This will follow all the EA process that is in place; this bill just enables the 30-day waiting period to be waived if there are no outstanding concerns after its successful completion.

My question to the member from Guelph is: Why not quicken the process after the successful completion, to get the municipal partners and other stakeholders to start—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member for Guelph for a response.

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** The reason, Speaker, is that I care about what the people of Ontario have to say. I think it's important for government to listen to people. I think it's important for us to analyze the expert advice that comes forward during the public comment period, and to take that into consideration before possibly making a decision that could produce significant harm to the people of Ontario or escalate costs related to that harm.

The 30-day period is there for a reason. It says that consultations are meaningful. It says that governments care about what people say and aren't simply going to disregard what the people of Ontario think.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**MPP Jamie West:** Thank you very much, Speaker, and thank you as well to the member from Guelph. You spoke a lot about environmental protection and the importance of recognizing it, and all the things the Conservative government has done to erode environmental protections.

We're in an age right now where climate change is real, and we all—well, most of us agree with it. Most people outside of here, I would say, all agree to it. Sophia Mathur in Sudbury was the first young woman outside of Europe to do climate strikes on Fridays, starting when she was 13; she's almost an adult now. I'm trying to understand where this climate change disconnect comes from, because Sophia is asking people to listen to the experts, to follow expert advice. Meanwhile, last term, the Conservative government's environment platform was litter cleanup day. Litter cleanup day is something that we were doing when I was a cub scout. That's not new policy. So why won't they listen to expert advice? Why is there this disconnect with climate change?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I just want to give a quick shout-out to Sophia, who's one of my heroes and a great young climate activist.

Speaker, I've just thought about the debate that has happened today. We're having hundred-year floods regularly in Windsor, the Ottawa region and Muskoka. There was one day in Toronto where, in three hours, there was \$84 million of flood damage. The costs are escalating.

That's exactly why I asked the Financial Accountability Officer to do a risk assessment for the province of Ontario. Our public infrastructure will have additional costs of \$26.2 billion over the next seven years—this decade alone. We're on the hook for that. If you want to talk about fiscal responsibility, let's maintain the environmental protections that are in place to prevent those costs from falling onto the people of Ontario.

0950

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions? I recognize the member for Mississauga–Malton.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** No, no.

*Interjections.*

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member for Scarborough–Rouge Park.

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** The people of Ontario want a government that's fiscally prudent, a government that saves taxpayer dollars cutting red tape and a government that's practising good governance. That's why our government is looking at new ways to access and upscale the real estate property that sits underused or empty, to better meet the needs of our province: for example, to optimize the existing funds in real estate to reinvest into addressing market inflation, to invest in capital repairs or rehabilitation.

That's what we are focusing on in this bill. Why does the member from Guelph want to spend taxpayers' money from Ontario?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I'm standing here right now pleading with this government to protect taxpayer dollars, to protect the \$26.2 billion in additional infrastructure costs we're going to experience because of the climate crisis and the dismantling of environmental protections.

Let's talk about the average homeowner: \$42,000 to fix a flooded basement. I'm here to protect taxpayers from rising insurance costs. Let's talk about the fact that environmental protections—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It's now time for further debate.

**Hon. David Piccini:** It's wonderful to rise in the Legislature to speak to this bill. I just wanted to briefly start off at the top with addressing a comment the member opposite said, the leader of the Green Party. He said, "Look before you leap." My mother used to say the same, but she also said, "Look before you speak." I think if the member were to give a closer look at the actual class EA process, he would know that the ERO posting goes concurrently with the listing with the proponent municipality—in the case of a waste water treatment plant, for example, going forward with the project—the class EA moves forward through the EA process, and it's open generally between 30 to 45 days for a comment period, sometimes 60 days on the ERO.

Class EAs take longer than that, so this position at the end of the class EA, this 30-day waiting period, would never—never—correspond with a comment period, so I really think it's important that we get that out there and address the facts.

Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise to this bill. As the Legislature is aware, this Environmental Assessment Act

has not been updated in 50 years—I'll repeat that again: 50 years. I think everyone in this Legislature would agree that a lot has changed in the last 50 years. I, for one, wasn't alive. The technology has changed. We're leveraging a lot of technology today to improve the way we do things, and that includes improving the Environmental Assessment Act. Yet the act itself has been frozen in time, in part a relic of the past that's holding Ontario back today.

The changes contained in this bill are not a revolution, Madam Speaker. In fact, I would submit to you that these are largely administrative in nature. They do not, as some in the opposition will have you believe, change the fabric of the EA process. This is a modernization of the act, reflective of the realities today. Simply put, the act is outdated and needs, like our environment, to constantly move and change to better reflect the realities of today and to better protect our environment.

Ontarians deserve better. They deserve a government that moves with them. They deserve an Environmental Assessment Act that helps support building a resilient Ontario.

The foundations of this act remain strong. The changes make the 30-day waiting period happen after the completion of the environmental assessment. This gives government the ability to waive that 30-day period, should all of the conditions have been met through the environmental assessment process. That's right, Madam Speaker: Following the completion of an environmental assessment, we're frozen, frozen in time for 30 seconds.

I just paused for two seconds. Nothing happened. I didn't address the substantive nature of this bill. I didn't provide any answers. That's what this does: things in time. I don't know about you, Madam Speaker—but depending on the circumstance, that seems inefficient. I would personally love to hear the rationale as to why, when a proponent has completed their due diligence and completed the environmental assessment process, they should be forced to wait automatically for 30 days with no ability to move forward with the project. Why should a municipality that needs to build a new waste water treatment plant keep clean drinking water on pause for an additional 30 days? It's nonsensical, but it's not surprising, as I listen to the members opposite. They voted no to more homes. They voted no to critical infrastructure projects to meet a modern and resilient Ontario. What does that mean? Modern waste water treatment plants, stormwater retention ponds—all of this is paused in time, is paused in this relic of an act, in as relic a nature as some of the members opposite.

Why should an immigrant who's looking to come to this province have to wait longer to access a home; why should a young person who's waiting in their parents' basement, who's looking to have the dignity of home ownership, have to wait because a municipality is paused while they build the critical waste water infrastructure needed to support a growing development or intensification?

Madam Speaker, I think of some of the closed-loop waste water treatment plants that I've had the opportunity to tour. I've seen some of the incredible technology. I'm going to talk a bit about some of my personal passions. I'm a big Star Trek fan, and I feel like I'm on the bridge of the

Enterprise sometimes when I'm in these waste water treatment plants, like one I recently toured in Millbrook, and I see the technology we're using today. I think everybody would agree, and I would submit, that that technology was not there 50 years ago today.

When that municipality has completed their class environmental assessment process, they're on pause; they're waiting for 30 days. In some cases, that 30 days can mean the closing of a construction window, which means we wait yet another year. I know that year doesn't matter to many in this Legislature—"Let the municipality wait." There's no justification—they will try and impute that that means somehow we are weakening environmental protections. How? They would rather us wait, for the sake of waiting, another year. They would rather us wait, for the sake of waiting, to tell that immigrant, "Sorry. Live in the basement." Even worse, the next generation, a person in this province who's desperate to have a roof over their head—they say, "Wait."

The municipality, like the member opposite who hails from Hamilton, with a lot of aged infrastructure—they would rather say to that municipality, "Wait. Clean drinking water can wait." I would submit to you that it can't.

To build a resilient Ontario, to build an Ontario that adapts to the changing realities of today, we have to have the option to move and waive that 30-day period, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Our government is committed to building a strong environmental assessment program that considers the input of local community and ensures that we focus our attention on those projects that have the highest impact on the environment.

We consulted with municipalities. The member from Windsor is an engineer and will know that the association of engineers supported us when we brought forward class environmental assessment process—I'll elaborate on that soon—when we brought forward an amendment to look at consolidated linear infrastructure.

I was recently in Brampton. Our incredible member in Brampton, MPP McGregor, brought together a round table where municipal staff who were there long before I was elected and who will be there long after I move on lauded the moves that this government has done on consolidated linear infrastructure.

Think permissions on a pipe-by-pipe basis versus looking in a holistic manner—that's how we've got to do things today. Technology has improved. We have much better waste water systems, storm, sani systems today than we did 50 years ago, and we've got to adapt to reflect that.

While development and building Ontario is, of course, important, let me make it crystal clear that the environmental standards and protections that are in place today will remain in place and continue to be long into the future. So those permissions are in place. While we look at the process that deals with those permissions, I think we can have a conversation about that process. I think we can say, for a nonsensical automatic 30-day waiting period, we should have the option to move forward if we're satisfied for class projects—that means they fall in a variety of

common classes that are quite standard. This isn't an individual EA; this is class assessments that are very standard, that municipalities now do with their eyes closed. That we would say, "We're not going to automatically pause you for 30 days," I think makes sense, and I would submit to you that the majority of Ontarians think the same.

#### 1000

As I mentioned, I'm a big Star Trek fan. One of my favourite episodes is "Mirror, Mirror." Sometimes in the members opposite, it's that other alternate reality. It's somewhat—I sometimes hear nasty statements, and so negative. I think if you flash forward and you look at what we're actually doing here and you look at what's happening, it's reflective of consultations with municipalities. It's reflective of what we hear. A nonsensical pause—the only thing that's really happening in that pause is that they're moving to this alternate reality where they're impugning all sorts of things that are really not reflective of what's actually before us today in the bill. They're incapable of actually addressing the bill and the measures in this bill because they understand it's nonsensical, a 30-day waiting period. It's a false choice, because it's not a choice. We don't need to choose between this pause and this sort of impugned—that we need to do this for the environment.

This, to me, makes absolute sense. It's what we've heard from the communities we've spoken to, and the proposed amendments are merely to provide the ability to waive or alter the 30-day review period, allowing projects to begin sooner. That actually doesn't change the section 16 order, which members should be familiar with. If a member of the public has concerns, even if it's a class EA—things that are commonly done, part of a class—even if all those conditions have been met and it's the position of the great staff scientists at MECP—who, again, will be there long after I move on—that the conditions have been met and the position of community members who have addressed comments in the ERO posting, there's still the ability for Ontarians to request a review order to the minister through section 16, and this does not change.

So there's many things in place to empower Ontarians to have their say, to voice their concerns in ways that most other jurisdictions just simply don't have, and I'm proud of that. I'm proud that in Ontario we have that.

As you can see, Madam Speaker, this pause really changes nothing. This is the effect of this arbitrary 30-day review period. It serves no purpose—perhaps 50 years ago, but today it doesn't. The current EA process requires that 30-day review, and it doesn't really make sense.

If you'll indulge me, I want to give context to what a class environmental assessment entails. A class EA is a proponent-led self-assessment process, and the majority of class EAs are undertaken by our municipal partners. The class EA establishes a planning process for projects that fall within a class of undertakings, such as a municipal class environmental assessment for infrastructure projects or electricity transmission projects.

So out of one side of one's mouth, we hear a call for electrification, for decarbonization, and then, out of the other side of one's mouth, we hear, "No, we've got to pause it. We need this automatic 30-day review period that's going to pause the transmission line." It doesn't make sense. You're smiling because you know. It doesn't make sense.

Class environmental assessments can be developed for classes of undertakings that are similar or routine in nature, such as building a road, building a water treatment plant, building a school or building a hospital. That member keeps saying 30 days, Madam Speaker—it's not a big issue for him: 30 days go by, and he still collects his paycheque. But when 30 days go by and we can't build a transmission in a construction window, it matters. When we can't build a hospital in that construction window, it matters. Not surprising, because he's voted against building hospitals in places like Brampton. He's voted against building new schools after a decade of darkness in which we saw 600 schools closed. Not surprising, because he did actually mull running for leader of that party that closed those schools down.

I don't know about you, Madam Speaker, but these projects seem like bad things to delay construction on for a month: building a critical road, building a water treatment plant that's leveraging modern technology to clean the water today, to provide clean drinking water, to provide clean water that's discharged into our tributaries. We're using incredible technology today that's much better than the technology we used 20 years ago, and in 20 years' time it's going to be even better, but not, Madam Speaker, if we have these nonsensical pauses.

Projects that fall under the class EA process have known potential environmental effects that are predictable and well understood. Building in Ontario is not a novel concept. Building a water treatment plant isn't novel. Building a school isn't. Building a hospital isn't. We have experts and expertise that guide us, and I believe in listening to those experts.

Class EA projects can be managed, Madam Speaker, through established impact-management methods. A class EA is routine—as I said, it's well understood—and this bill does not make any changes in the execution of that EA. Anyone who says otherwise either has not read the bill or does not understand it, or, worse, one is intentionally misleading Ontarians. All this means that a project that falls within a class of undertakings in a class environment assessment is approved, as long as the proponent successfully completes the approved planning process.

Despite what members may say, let me assure you, Madam Speaker, that any class environmental assessment requires public consultation, robust postings on the ERO and a comment period. After all the work is complete, then we wait. We wait some more. And, yes, we wait and wait and wait. No work gets done. We're not seeing cleaner drinking. We're not seeing a home being built. We're not seeing a hospital being built. We're not seeing a waste

water treatment plant being built. We wait for 30 days, and no work is done until that 30-day period expires.

This gives the ability to waive that 30-day period. I think to a recent example in Mississauga where this was quite literally the difference between a year of waiting—and do you know what happened in that year? We entered 2022-23, where we saw massive inflation.

But they don't mind, because there is no government spending they won't support. The party with the taxpayers' money will never end for the members opposite, because it doesn't matter. You wait another year and this has kicked it into another construction cycle? It doesn't matter. Inflation? Just a number; keep spending.

But when we've met the robust environmental oversight, why wait needlessly for a waste water treatment plant that the community needs now? To call this an unnecessary delay is an understatement. And I have said this is not costless. There is always a cost—a cost to the people of Ontario. This does nothing to change the process in the class environmental assessment. This is a mandatory waiting period.

But not surprising—they wait; they wait. They're going to wait a long time to form government, Madam Speaker, because they never will, because Ontarians recognize that we have to get it done when it comes to clean drinking water. We have to get it done when it comes to building public transit projects that are going to take cars off the road and that are going to get people using public transit. We're not going to wait when it comes to giving a new Canadian the ability to put a roof over their head and provide for their family. We're not going to wait when it comes to leveraging modern technology to provide clean drinking water to Ontarians or to deal with decade-old infrastructure that's discharging and we're seeing spills and overflows leaking into our rivers, our bodies of water.

We need to upgrade these things, and these upgrades and these routine infrastructure upgrades that fall under a class EA process don't need to wait for an arbitrary mandatory 30-day waiting period. If conditions have been met and if, according to municipalities, the proponents, the scientists within the ministry, the directors—because there is statutory authority, not given to me, but given to directors within the ministry that are there long before and long after I have the privilege of being environment minister. But if, in everybody's opinion, these conditions are met, we can waive the 30-day waiting period. It is quite literally the difference in many cases—and I have a number of tangible examples, like the one in Mississauga I cited, or like some in my own community in Cobourg and Port Hope—between one construction season to the next.

#### 1010

What happens when you're moving forward on the class EA process and you're lining up contractors and trades—they're falling further and further out of touch with labourers and workers in this province; it's not a surprise that those unions backed us in the last election, because they understand that waiting causes massive uncertainty for those workers. Waiting causes massive



uncertainty for the planned growth with the new waste water treatment plant. And we're saying that if conditions have been met, let's have the ability to waive that 30-day pause. It's so we can build a more prosperous Ontario. It's so we can build a more resilient Ontario. It's so we can leverage modern technology to better make ourselves resilient to the impacts of climate change, utilize the latest technology in our stormwater and sanitary.

This isn't sexy stuff, but it's important stuff that the Premier understands is needed to build an Ontario for tomorrow. A tomorrow for the young immigrant that's looking to Ontario to start a family and wants to have a roof over their head. An Ontario that a senior, a young person, can get on public transit and get themselves not just from point A to point B, but a better quality of life.

We're not going to apologize, Madam Speaker, for making sure we leave no stone unturned in making sure we achieve the potential of that Ontario for everybody in this province to enjoy. And while they wait and while they entrench the relics of a time long gone by, we're going to move forward to build a better, more climate-resilient Ontario for all Ontarians to enjoy.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It's now time for questions and answers.

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** I'm glad to have an opportunity to ask the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks a few questions about the environment, about public input. He's referring to this 30-day pause after the class EA process period as being a nonsensical pause, but it's an opportunity for the ministry to review all comments received and any concerns, and I would say that the voices of communities should matter to this government.

The Auditor General, as I raised yesterday, outlined clearly that ministry after ministry doesn't seem to be considering public input, and that's an unfortunate pattern for this government. We also know, according to their affordability task force, we don't require the land in the greenbelt. I wonder how the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks actually feels about the fact that we're doing such harm to the greenbelt in the province of Ontario?

**Hon. David Piccini:** There's a lot to unpack there, but I want to address the critical piece in this bill. We heard how the members opposite would govern if, God forbid, they ever had the chance to do so in Ontario. They feel that MECP sit on their hands and wait until the class EA process is done, which reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the class EA process. We don't close our eyes, hold our breath and close our ears and eyes until the end of the six-month process. It's a constant relationship where we're back and forth with the proponent on a constant basis, where we're addressing any challenges and where we're responsive to the ERO posting and that feedback.

Months later, when this is done and there's this arbitrary 30-day waiting period, they want us to start reviewing it then. Well, I've got news for them: MECP is constantly working with proponents from day one, not closing their eyes and ears, as the members opposite would have them do.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Unfortunately, we are out of time for questions and answers, but we are going to be moving to members' statements.

*Second reading debate deemed adjourned.*

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### PROJECT HOPE

**Ms. Jess Dixon:** My favourite social media platform is definitely Instagram. It's a kinder and more gentler place than others. I wanted to shout-out a story that I've been following on Instagram. It's called Project Hope.

Project Hope was started by two Toronto police officers, Farzad Ghotbi and Mustafa Popalzai. Both of them are immigrants to Canada from Iran and from Afghanistan. In August 2021, when Officer Popalzai saw Afghan refugees trying to get on a plane, he started Project Hope to gather supplies for those arriving in Canada. This is a humble beginning. Since its inception, they've gathered over \$425,000 worth of supplies for Afghan refugees.

On February 10, when the earthquake struck Türkiye and Syria, they again put out a call for donations of brand-new baby supplies, first aid supplies, blankets, clothing, etc. By the last day of the drive, February 28, they had gathered over \$120,000 of donations of brand new items. Thanks to their work, their dedication and countless hours spent by Toronto police officers across the city, those donations have been gathered up and are on their way. I want to thank both of those gentlemen for their incredible work.

### ONTARIO PLACE

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** Ontario Place was opened in 1971 to showcase and celebrate the beauty of this province and to allow easy access to our waterfront for everyone to enjoy. Now the Ford government wants to hand over this historic and valuable public space to a foreign developer, the Therme Group, who plans to turn it into a private water park and spa. The Premier wants to give the developer 650 million public dollars as a subsidy for this private spa at Ontario Place. This makes zero sense. How does this serve the interests of Ontarians? For less than half the amount, the government could refurbish Ontario Place into a world-class park destination.

The Premier wants to spend 450 million public dollars for a 2,000-spot underground parking lot to support this private spa, when the Ontario Line is going to have a stop right at Ontario Place. How is this value for money for Ontarians? It's no surprise the Ford government is doing all of this with no public consultation, transparency or regard for heritage. Even the city of Toronto was not included in any discussions about the future of Ontario Place.

By giving away precious public waterfront space, this government is showing total operational incompetence, a complete lack of imagination on how to revitalize these

valuable assets and downright disregard for public lands. Ontario Place belongs to the people, not to Premier Ford.

### SCHOOL FACILITIES

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** It is with great pleasure today that I rise to recognize two transformative school projects under way right now in Windsor and in Tecumseh.

Two weeks ago, the member for Perth–Wellington travelled to Windsor to celebrate the opening of the new Catholic Central secondary school. When the project is completed, Catholic Central will finally have some of the amenities we all take for granted in school, like having an outdoor sports field. Right now, it doesn't have one. Seven consecutive funding asks to the province for the project were turned down by the previous Liberal government until funding was conditionally approved in 2016. Our government, in comparison, got the job done by approving an extra \$7 million on top of the \$26 million for the building, so that the students could learn at a suitable site, steps away from beautiful Jackson Park.

In my own neighbourhood, D.M. Eagle Public School has long served as the pride and joy of St. Clair Beach, where it proudly stands today overlooking the historic Beach Grove Golf and Country Club. Under the previous Liberal government, this school was on track to join the many school closures that we've experienced in the town of Tecumseh and was planned to be re-established outside of our municipal limits. But in 2021, Minister Lecce approved additional funding of \$3.3 million to keep it just one block west of the existing school, on top of the \$25.7 million previously approved. I am proud to say it is our government that finished the job.

I want to recognize and thank the Ontario government for finally ending the roadblocks and delays encountered for these projects and for ensuring that Windsor and Tecumseh students and their families have access to a quality learning environment close to home.

### COMMUNITY SERVICES

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, as the saying goes, and yet this government is underfunding vital community supports and services that keep people out of the hospital. Thirty-two organizations that provide community supports in Ottawa and in eastern Ontario are being forced to implement service cuts of up to 40% because of this government's refusal to provide adequate funding. They are being asked to respond to increased need while still operating on 2012 funding levels.

The Olde Forge Community Resource Centre in my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean is one of these organizations. They provide essential supports and care to seniors and adults with disabilities, allowing them to stay in their own homes longer and keeping them out of hospitals and long-term-care facilities. Yet this government's refusal to support this important work means the Olde Forge will be forced to cut up to 22% of their services this year.

On Monday, 15 hospital CEOs in eastern Ontario co-signed a letter to the Premier and the Minister of Health requesting adequate funding for the community support sector, because they recognize these services keep people out of hospitals and get them home from the hospital sooner.

### 1020

An investment of just \$7 million would mean these organizations can maintain their level of service. That's pocket change compared to what we spend on the hospital sector. I hope the Premier and Minister of Health will do the right thing and listen to the call to invest in these vital services.

### HOMELESSNESS

**Mr. Rob Flack:** It is exciting to share some great news from London, Ontario, with this House today. Like many communities in Ontario, London is experiencing a homelessness crisis. I'm proud to say that over the past three years, our government has invested nearly \$4.4 billion in housing and homelessness support through our municipal and Indigenous program partners.

However, homelessness remains a pressing issue, as we all know. In response to this crisis, over 260 citizens came together to make transformational change. They came from a range of sectors, including health and social services, institutional health care, education, emergency services, business and economic development, city officials and staff from provincial and federal ministries. Throughout the last three months, a comprehensive whole-of-community systems response has been devised and approved by the municipal council, with implementation to begin immediately in keeping with the critical circumstances on our streets.

Inspired by this community-wide effort, a fund was created called fundforchange.ca, initiated by one anonymous London family with an incredible—I repeat, incredible—gift of \$25 million and an additional \$5 million in matching funds, inspiring the rest of the community to join this noble cause. Impressive indeed, Speaker.

I, along with my colleagues from London in this Legislature representing London, our Forest City, hope that this magnificent philanthropic response, supported with incredible financial support from the citizens of our city, will prove to be a model that can be applied across Ontario, and indeed across Canada.

### BANGLADESHI HERITAGE MONTH

**Ms. Doly Begum:** It is an honour to rise today to address an important proclamation. In Ontario, the month of March marks Bangladeshi Heritage Month. This month, we pay tribute to and celebrate the thriving, strong and vibrant Bangladeshi community in Ontario.

March is a very special month for our community, as March 26 commemorates Independence Day, the day that Bangladesh, in 1971, declared independence from Pakistan. This declaration led to the beginning of a nine-

month-long bloody war where many lives were sacrificed. Youth, intellectuals, men and women fought and sacrificed so much for an independent nation. After this period, known as the liberation war, on December 16 a new nation was born.

Scarborough Southwest is home to an active Bangladeshi community whose contributions to our communities across the province have been extraordinary. This is a community that gives light and hope to Scarborough, with amazing talent, so many local businesses, food, art and performances, as well as community leaders who continue to stand by their neighbours. I'm looking forward to spending this month honouring our culture and heritage, remembering the history and enhancing the work and voices of our community here in our province, as a Bangladeshi Canadian who has the honour of representing our incredible community.

Speaker, I'm honoured to be a member of this amazing community. On behalf of our Legislature, I know that I can wish all the Bangladeshis across Ontario and across Canada a happy Bangladeshi Heritage Month.

#### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. John Jordan:** I am pleased to rise in the House today to applaud this government's efforts to deliver integrated, team-based models of care in Ontario. In these models, a team of health care professionals from various disciplines works together to address the patient's physical, mental and social well-being. Thanks to the leadership of Premier Ford and our Minister of Health, Aboriginal health access centres, family health teams and community health centres are delivering quality care in an integrated and collaborative way throughout the province of Ontario.

Residents of Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston are benefiting from the services of the Smiths Falls Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic; Rideau Community Health Services—a CHC model; ConnectWell Community Health—another CHC model' and the Ottawa Valley Family Health Team. Recent provincial funding has enabled the Ottawa Valley Health Team to expand their services to residents of Mississippi Mills, Carleton Place and Beckwith—the fastest-growing community in Canada. This is the kind of efficient, collaborative model that ultimately enhances physician recruitment in a highly competitive market.

Our thanks again to Premier Ford, our Minister of Health and parliamentary assistants, the member from Eglinton–Lawrence and the member from Newmarket–Aurora, for supporting an integrated approach to high-quality care for patients at every level. The people of Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston thank you for getting it done.

#### FERRY SERVICE

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** This government can't be trusted to manage the economy. There's a shortage of MTO ferry crews, service is being disrupted, and yet, with Bill 124, this government has suppressed salaries below prevailing wages, so, naturally, ferries are losing workers.

I'll start with paramedic service on Wolfe Island, which was recently cut again in favour of paramedic crews based

on the mainland. Residents were told that adding the new, second ferry could compensate during emergencies. Now, not only has the new ferry been tied up for a year awaiting crew and not only has the current service been disrupted by the lack of crew, now MTO is saying, not surprisingly, that they have to break their promise of running the new ferry alongside the old ferry because—wait for it—there's a lack of crew.

What's making the staffing shortage worse? This government has been suppressing wages with Bill 124. Workers have been sucked away to the private sector. This government has been hiring temporary crew from agencies to fill permanent positions and incurring much higher costs. Regular salaries are \$23 an hour for deckhands, \$38 an hour for a captain. My order paper question revealed that the Conservatives are paying \$86 an hour for temporary workers. That's salaries, expenses and also agency profits.

This is the exact same pattern we've seen with nurses in Ontario. It's a pattern of economic mismanagement we cannot afford.

#### CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Vannakam. The new year brings hope, optimism and rejuvenation for all of us. As we move into the new year of 2023, we renew our energies for the year with a fresh beginning for the festivities of Thai Pongal, Tamil heritage and the Chinese lunar new year in my ethnically diverse riding of Markham–Thornhill.

Thai Pongal is a harvesting festival which can be considered as the Tamil new year. It is celebrated among the 400,000 Tamil communities in Ontario and around the world. It's a festival that symbolizes thanksgiving and is truly the emblem of Tamil heritage. It is dedicated to the sun, or Suraya, and livestock.

The Tamil language is one of the oldest classical languages used in modern times, spoken for 5,000 years in South Asia, and now over 100 million people speak Tamil.

I celebrated and organized many Thai Pongal events with my MPP colleagues which rocked Markham–Thornhill. Especially, my constituents thank Minister Stephen Lecce, who graced the occasion with his presence at the Markham theatre. Close to 200 students, our local talents, showcased their vibrant cultural performance. I thank the parents and teachers who trained these young dancers.

I am fortunate to have a huge Asian community in my riding. We organized a lunar new year celebration. Everyone loved the dragon dances and delicious food.

Xiu Xiu. Pongalo Pongal.

#### COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Last Saturday, I was pleased to be joined by wife, Vicky, members of my staff and their families to participate in the Coldest Night of the Year walk in Pembroke.

Coldest Night of the Year began in 2011 at two locations and has continued to grow, to the point where 166

locations took part in 2022, with over 31,000 walkers. CNOY was instituted to give people a sense of what it would be like to experience homelessness on the coldest night of the year.

### 1030

As in the past, the Pembroke walk was in support of the Grind, a non-profit organization that supports youth and adults who are marginalized and struggling to live a normal life. Some 256 walkers participated this year, raising over \$105,000. I've seen first-hand the tremendous work that the Grind does locally and have been truly moved by the compassionate way in which they operate. It is a faith-based organization that accepts and supports all people, regardless of age, ethnicity, sexual preference or social status, providing non-judgmental support through their client services office and supporting agencies and programs.

Having had the opportunity to visit the Grind myself on multiple occasions has given me a much greater understanding and perspective of the breadth of services it provides to support those who are homeless, marginalized or at risk.

Once again, our team of walkers, known as the Yak Pak, were proud to support this wonderful cause. If you're in the area, I would encourage be you to drop by the Grind yourself and see what wonderful things are taking place there.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** As the members all know, the RNAO is visiting us today. It is an honour to welcome president Claudette Holloway and, of course, a friend of all, Doris Grinspun, RNAO CEO. Please join me in welcoming them to Queen's Park.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** I also welcome all members of the RNAO here into your House, but especially, I want to acknowledge Dr. Claudette Holloway, president, and of course, Dr. Doris Grinspun, CEO.

I also want to acknowledge a former member of Parliament for Beaches–East York, Matthew Kellway, who is here in the gallery.

Thank you so much. We look forward to seeing you all today.

**Hon. Michael Parsa:** I'd like to introduce Rohan Goel from the great riding of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill, who is today's page captain. I'd also like to welcome his family to the Legislature: his mother, Veenu Goel; his father, Vinay Goel; and his siblings, Rishabh and Roshni Goel. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I would like to welcome to the House the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, including those nurses I met this morning: Kathy Moreland, Michelle Heyer, Josalyn Radcliffe, Linda Sheiban Taucar, Simon Donato-Woodger. Thank you so much for all of the work that you've done to keep us all healthy through the pandemic.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** I would like to introduce Janet Greaves, who is a nurse practitioner from my area who I met this morning and have met with in the riding as well.

It's great to see her here this morning. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I would like to welcome members from the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, and in particular, Sarah Lynne Myllyaho, Tanis Banovsky and Duncan McWaters, who travelled here from Thunder Bay. I appreciate so much the effort you took to come. Thank you and welcome.

**Mr. Billy Pang:** I would like to welcome students, volunteers and teachers from Markham–Unionville's Lincoln Alexander Public School. There are more than 70 of them.

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** Good morning. I'd like to welcome all the nurses who travelled down from Niagara from the RNAO.

As well, I would like to welcome Clare Flynn. She has been in my office, shadowing me around for the past couple of weeks. Welcome to your House, Clare, and thank you for all of your hard work.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I'd like to welcome nurses from Kingston today, Debra Lefebvre, Heather Hamilton and Daria Hope, and also somebody who grew up in Kingston, a former colleague in the House of Commons, Matthew Kellway.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I would like to introduce a couple of nurse practitioners from my riding—they've got an application in for a nurse-practitioner-led clinic—Shayna McLaughlan and Erica Atfield, as well as a couple of my staff members who are here today, Sally Carson and Jenna DePaiva.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I would like to welcome nurse Marketa from St. Paul's, along with the RNAO president, Dr. Claudette Holloway, and the CEO, Dr. Doris Grinspun.

I'd also like to thank the RNAO's Black Nurses Task Force. Thank you to the co-chairs, Dr. Angela Cooper Brathwaite and Corsita Garraway, and to all the outstanding nurses who are here. Thank you for your outstanding work.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** For the first time at question period, I have a member of my staff who is actually leaving us. Please join me in welcoming Andrew Vittas. He's actually worked for MPP Scott, Minister McNaughton and myself. I'm not sure what that means about me, but well done, Andrew. It's been an honour.

**M. Joel Harden:** Ça me fait honneur de saluer mes collègues de la fédération des étudiants de l'Ontario.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome the Canadian Federation of Students, Ontario section. I had the pleasure to meet with Navya, Alistair, Gishleine, Reeon, who are with us in the members' gallery, and Andrew.

Also, props and thanks to the folks from RNAO. It's great to see you here this morning.

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** I'd like to offer a warm welcome to Sarah Weaver from my riding of Chatham–Kent–Leamington, a tireless volunteer, young professional and an amazing person. Thank you. Welcome to your House.

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** I would like to welcome page Taylor Moore from my riding of Don Valley North. Welcome, Taylor.

## QUESTION PERIOD

## MUNICIPAL FINANCES

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** The Financial Accountability Office's latest report paints a very dark picture for Ontario's municipalities. Despite swimming in \$6.4 billion, this government is shortchanging our cities and towns. They're withholding \$120 million for services and a further \$644 million earmarked for repairs to infrastructure, to broadband and other supports that people out there desperately need.

Can the Premier explain to Ontarians why he doesn't deem their communities worthy of the investments his government promised?

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

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you—Mr. Speaker, through you to the member opposite—for that question. I've got the fall economic statement here. I've got the budget from last April that we took to the people.

As I go around, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing goes around, and the Premier and the Deputy Premier, we talk to big-city mayors. We talk to rural mayors. We talk to all kinds of mayors. And do you know what they keep telling us? Thank you for the investments that we're making in their communities.

What do I hear? Maybe you should get out and listen a little bit. You know what I hear? Thank you to the Minister of Infrastructure for investments in broadband, which is so critical to many of our communities.

Do you know what else we hear? Thank you for the investments in the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund so they can upgrade their water and their sewage, which we doubled to \$2 billion.

Just recently, at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, they said thank you for the—

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Let me tell the minister what's really happening out there. This government is hitting municipalities on all sides. First, they let their rich developer friends skip the bill and starve municipalities out of billions, and then they sit on nearly \$1 billion earmarked for municipal services and infrastructure.

1040

Now people from Oshawa to Thunder Bay are facing massive increases in their property taxes as municipalities are scrambling to make up for that lost funding. In Waterloo region alone, taxes are going up 8.55% at a time when people are already hurting.

Go out there and talk to homeowners. Their heating bills are up. Their grocery bills are through the roof. Can this Premier explain why he's making everyday Ontarians pay his developer friends' bills?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know what kind of math they're teaching in Waterloo, but that just isn't the truth in terms of actually understanding—

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

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** First time in five years I do that. Withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

When we go to places like the Waterloo region, do you know what they say? They say thank you for the investments in infrastructure right across this whole province. They say thank you for helping us with building highways—not just the 413 and the Bradford Bypass but Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph. That's what they're talking about. They're talking about the widening of Highway 17 all the way from Arnprior to Renfrew. They're talking about the Timmins connecting link.

They're talking about moving people and goods so that the hard-working people of this province can take their kids to school, that they can take their goods to market. That's what we're doing in this province.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Do you know what they're teaching in Waterloo, Speaker? They're teaching quantum physics in Waterloo.

Look, this is about this government giving their insider developer friends a free ride. Municipal governments keep doing more with less, but at every turn they're met with nothing but disdain and blame from this Premier.

Some municipalities are estimating that by limiting their ability to charge developer fees, this government is bilking them out of tens of millions of dollars over the next five years. Toronto alone is anticipating \$2.3 billion in lost revenue. Local governments run the buses people take to work. They maintain our local roads, and they try to build the affordable housing units we so desperately need.

When is this government going to commit to stop off-loading their costs onto municipalities and partner with them to build stronger, more caring communities?

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

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Again to the Leader of the Opposition: What she's really saying is, she's against non-profit housing providers, like Habitat for Humanity, from getting deferred development charges.

Many of the opposition members, when they were on local councils, voted in favour of deferring or eliminating development charges for non-profit housing and other groups like Habitat for Humanity. So when they were municipal councillors, they were in favour of this type of policy, but now that they're part of the NIMBY party, they're going to be against it. When it comes to the NDP, their housing policy has no merit.

## EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, let me tell you, this has nothing to do with non-profits or building affordable housing. With this government—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order. Stop the clock.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock. The government side must come to order. I have to be able to hear the member who has the floor. At the present time, it's the Leader of the Opposition, not the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, although he might get his turn.

Start the clock. Leader of the Opposition.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, with this government, people out there know it's about who you know and how much you'll pay for it.

Back in 2018, one of the first things this government did was take away permanent paid sick days from working people. What a cruel way to start their term, and terrible public policy too. People should not have to choose between putting their co-workers, customers and community at risk or losing a day's pay. We have tabled three times now, since then, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act. It would give people 10 permanent paid sick days, but you vote it down every time.

Will this government give workers the time they need to recover and keep people safe by backing the NDP plan for 10 permanent paid sick days?

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

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** Mr. Speaker, we were the first province in Canada to bring in paid sick days during the pandemic to support those workers, Mr. Speaker. We were the first province in the country to bring in job-protected leave to ensure that when those workers stayed home, they couldn't be fired from their job.

We're working for workers every single day. I'll remind the Leader of the Opposition that she voted against our plan to hire 100 more health and safety inspectors in this province to bring the inspectorate to the highest in provincial history.

This is an NDP party that has abandoned workers in this province. But under the leadership of Premier Ford, we'll work for our workers every single day.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** I'll point out, Speaker, that those measures that the minister talked about are temporary and they end at the end of this month.

The Conservative members must be hearing the same stories that we are from people in communities all across this province who are exhausted. They feel abandoned by this government, parents living in constant fear that if they or their kid gets sick, they won't be able to pay their rent or afford the groceries. And the Premier can stay home when he gets sick.

Why do these workers deserve anything less? Will this government finally side with working people and make sure everyone has access to 10 permanent paid sick days?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Premier.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Mr. Speaker, do you know what helps workers? I'll tell you what helps workers. When we took office in 2018, the NDP and the Liberals ran 300,000

jobs out of this province. As we stand here today, there are 600,000 more people being able to pay rent, pay a mortgage, buy a home, get a car—and an electric vehicle car. Because we're creating the environment and the conditions for companies to come here and thrive and prosper and grow, and when they thrive, prosper and grow, Mr. Speaker, the people that work at those companies thrive, prosper and grow.

It puts more money into their pockets, more job security. This is an employee's market right now. We're short 380,000 people to fill the jobs. Our GDP is at \$1 trillion now—eighteenth largest in the entire world, right here in Ontario. That's what helps people.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Boy, I tell you, this Premier is so out of touch. This room is filled today with nurses who are leaving this province at record levels. Nursing has become our greatest export from this province because this government fails to respect working people in this province.

Speaker, it took COVID for this government to give even anyone the three paid sick days. Only for COVID, only for the first time you get COVID, and even that ends at the end of March. Get out there and listen to people in communities across this province—they are struggling—people like parents who can't take time off because they need to put food on the table. It is not a laughing matter; it is not something you should be applauding yourselves for.

Government could do something about this. Will you give them the paid sick days that they need?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** We love our nurses. We know the dedication. They go in day in and day out. But I'll tell you the numbers, Mr. Speaker. Since 2018, there are 60,000 more nurses registered here in Ontario. There are 8,000 more doctors. We set a new record; there were 12,000 alone just last year.

We're going to continue hiring nurses. There are 30,000 nurses in our colleges and universities ready to serve. We're grateful and we think the world of our nurses.

## LABOUR DISPUTES

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** Premier, if you actually loved and supported nurses, you wouldn't be fighting them in court over Bill 124.

My question is to the Premier. In my riding, Windsor Salt workers, members of Unifor Locals 1959 and 240, have been on strike for weeks now to stop the contracting out of good-paying union jobs. They're fighting an attempt at union busting. The owners of Windsor Salt, Stone Canyon Industries, have tried to break the picket line and resume production.

**1050**

Will the Premier finally support workers in this province—these workers in particular—pass anti-scab legislation, and fight back against the outsourcing of union jobs?

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

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** I'm obviously aware of the situation down in Windsor.

Mr. Speaker, we always encourage employers, labour—workers—to sit down and get a deal at the table. We're proud of our labour relations in this province; 99% of deals are done at the table.

We're working every single day to ensure that workers in Ontario have better jobs and bigger paycheques. I think of the Windsor-Essex region and the amount of young people getting into the skilled trades, joining those unions down in Windsor to build better lives for themselves and their families. We'll continue, every day, putting forward worker-friendly policies so they earn better jobs and bigger paycheques.

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

**Mrs. Lisa Gretzky:** Maybe if the minister actually believed in collective bargaining, the government, as the biggest employer, would not have brought in Bill 124 and Bill 28.

Speaker, in Leamington, Highbury Canco workers, members of UFCW Local 175, are also on strike, and the company is busing in scab workers.

This government talks about working for workers, but time and time again, they have attacked workers' collective bargaining rights with Bill 124 and Bill 28. In fact, they supported the Liberals with Bill 115, another unconstitutional bill.

Will this government actually work for workers, stand up for collective bargaining rights and pass anti-scab legislation?

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** Mr. Speaker, we'll continue working for workers every day in this province. That's why, in the June election, we had the endorsement of eight labour unions in this province, representing hundreds of thousands of workers.

We believe that government, labour and business have to work together. That's how we're going to improve the lives of people in this province and build stronger communities.

That's why I'm proud to say that under the leadership of Premier Ford, we introduced the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act. We introduced the Working for Workers legislation that ensured that gig workers, for the first time in history, get minimum wage—that we increase fines to those companies that are breaking the law, that we ensure that there are naloxone kits in workplaces. The opposition NDP voted against these measures in Working for Workers.

We'll take no lessons from a party that, years ago, abandoned the working people of this province.

That's why we elect Progressive Conservatives in Windsor-Essex.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The next question. The member for Brampton North.

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** I ask the NDP, what would workers do under an NDP government? You don't support highways, you don't support jobs—

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** —you don't support investment—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock.

I guess I need to point out to the House that you can't ask questions of the official opposition. You need to address your question to the government.

Start the clock.

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** I'm sorry, Speaker. I had the wrong notes in front of me.

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** My question is for the President of the Treasury Board, the minister responsible for emergency management. He's a fellow Brampton boy; I expect a straight answer.

First, I'd like to recognize the dedication and tireless efforts of all those who are involved in Ontario's emergency planning, preparedness and response network. They're heroes, and we're all grateful for everything they do in caring for the people of our province.

The need for local and provincial declarations of emergencies can arise for a number of reasons, and it's essential that response plans are current and reflect best practices.

We know that our government values the safety of all individuals and communities. However, more can be done in safeguarding Ontarians from unanticipated emergencies.

Can the minister please explain what action our government is taking to strengthen its emergency management response operations?

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** I want to thank my colleague—Brampton's finest—from Brampton North for that great question and his tireless advocacy on behalf of the people of Brampton and across this province.

He's absolutely right: There's nothing more important than the safety and well-being of our families and loved ones, and Ontarians across this province are counting on our government to get emergency planning right. That is why, earlier this month, our government released Ontario's first ever Provincial Emergency Management Strategy and Action Plan. We are the first province in the entire country to put forward a plan.

Our new plan establishes a framework for emergency management in Ontario. This sets out a one-window approach to coordinate emergency response across this province. It's a proactive planning and monitoring tool to keep Ontarians informed, and we set out practised and prepared emergency response with training and education across this province. We will—

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

Supplementary question.

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his fantastic response. The importance of ensuring that our province is as prepared as possible for any potential emergency cannot be understated. Sadly, the previous Liberal government, backed by the NDP most of the time, left us with gaps in our emergency response system, leaving our province vulnerable and ill-prepared.

Under the leadership of the Premier and this minister, it is reassuring that our government is spearheading a comprehensive emergency management plan for all of Ontario.

Can the minister please provide more details about how our government is approaching the vital work of safeguarding and protecting our province?

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** The member is absolutely right: The previous Liberal government left many gaps in emergency management, whether it was freezing hospital budgets, firing nurses or leaving stockpiles of PPE empty. Our government committed to making sure that would never happen again.

We are also taking a role of collaborating with our emergency management partners across this province. With an increase in wildfires, floods and other potential emergencies that threaten Ontarian's safety and communities, it is critical that we have a plan in place to respond to these crises quickly.

That is why, as a government, we have worked across this province with partners, including municipalities and First Nations partners to develop a plan that highlights the actions that our government is taking to keep Ontarians safe and in a constant state of readiness and preparedness across this province. Our commitment to communities across this province is to ensure we are emergency-ready.

#### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Joel Harden:** My question is to the Premier. Good morning, Premier.

A private, for-profit surgical clinic is operating for the second time this Saturday at the Riverside Campus of the Ottawa Hospital from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Meanwhile, there is a long backlog of orthopaedic surgeries—over 2,000—to members of the public who are waiting for the public health care they were promised. This is another example of our public operating rooms being closed to the public who paid for them but open to the profit of a select few.

A question to the Premier: Will this government get public operating rooms fully up and running for everyone?

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

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** This question gives me an opportunity to highlight some of the things that our government has been doing to deal with surgical backlogs that, I might remind the member, existed prior to the pandemic.

We have, as a government, invested with our hospital partners over \$800 million for surgical recovery to deal with exactly that: the surgical backlog that resulted as a result of the pandemic.

I can tell you that there are some innovative models that are happening in the province of Ontario that are leading to successes. This is not an either/or. This is an expansion. This is an opportunity for people who have been waiting far too long to get those necessary surgeries to happen in community and in a timely manner so that they can go back to work, back in their community and back with their families. It is a good-news story, and we will continue to invest in those innovative models.

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

**Mr. Joel Harden:** Back to the Premier, or perhaps that infomercial we just heard from the minister. I mean—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm going to caution the member on his language. That's not helpful. Please place your question.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** I understand your warning, Speaker.

It is a sad day when there are nurses in this building who work very hard for us every single day, we ask serious questions about the attack on the funding of our public hospitals, and we get talking points back.

What we know in Ottawa today about this clinic is that nurses are being offered, inside our public hospitals, twice the salary to work in these for-profit, private clinics. We know it's going to get harder to keep nurses in our public system as a result of your efforts to hand over these surgeries to for-profit clinics.

**1100**

A serious question, Speaker: Is this government going to invest in our public operating rooms instead of selling them off or renting them out?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** Mr. Speaker, this is a member who is encouraging and actually participating in protests in front of community surgical units. I will not take lessons from a member who doesn't understand that there are people who are waiting for surgeries who want to have access.

Clinical surgeries in community have existed in the province of Ontario for decades, and, I might also remind the member opposite, approved by Progressive Conservative governments, by Liberal governments and, yes, by NDP governments, because they understand the value of ensuring that people have access to publicly funded services where and when they need them.

#### OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** My question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Strong workplace health and safety practices ensure that all workers and employers are safe and protected on the job. In the construction sector, workers deserve access to hygienic washroom facilities. The regulations for construction projects under the Occupational Health and Safety Act are clear: Workers must have access to clean workrooms. Thanks to the leadership of the Premier and this minister, there is a record number of building projects under way in the communities across our province.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what our government is doing to ensure that all workers have access to clean and safe washroom facilities?

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** Thank you very much. This is a really important question that the member for Don Valley North has asked this morning. The member has hit the nail on the head: Clean bathrooms are essential to respecting the hard-working men and women who are building the homes, schools, hospitals and transit that our communities and families rely on. Everywhere I go, I hear from workers about the state of bathrooms on some job



sites, in factories and in retail. In 2022 alone, my ministry visited worksites more than 23,000 times to inspect bathrooms and issued nearly 2,000 orders for bathrooms in poor condition.

Speaker, my message to workers is clear: Our government has your backs. We stand with you, the workers who are out there building Ontario and all of our communities every single day.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order.

Supplementary question?

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** Thank you to the minister for the response. The dignity of workers is of paramount importance to me and my constituents in the riding of Don Valley North. I am pleased to know that ministry inspectors are attending worksites to ensure that washroom facilities meet health and safety standards. We know that the benefits of safe workplaces include higher productivity, healthier workplaces, better recruitment and retention, and fewer fines and workplace disruptions.

Speaker, can the minister please elaborate on how the government is supporting the health and safety of workers in Ontario?

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** Thank you again to the member for this really important question. Speaker, let me say this very simply: Everyone has a right to clean and safe bathrooms at work. Workers deserve better.

I'm pleased to report that my ministry is currently conducting a workplace bathroom blitz to ensure that those out there building Ontario have access to clean bathrooms. In February of this year, as part of the ongoing blitz that's going to be run until March 31, ministry inspectors issued about 130 orders related to construction worksite washrooms, ensuring that the workers who are building our province have access to facilities they deserve.

Speaker, we'll continue working for workers and make sure that everyone going to work has a healthy and safe workplace.

#### NATURAL GAS RATES

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** Speaker, through you to the Premier: Seniors and young families are being pressed to the limit as your government has allowed Enbridge to pass along increases in gas prices that are making life very hard for Ontarians.

The Ontario Electricity Support Program provides immediate on-bill relief for families who struggle to pay their electricity bills, but there is no similar program for families struggling to pay natural gas bills or other heating bills. Will this government establish such a program in its upcoming budget so every family who struggles to heat their home can get support?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Energy.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** My goal, as the Minister of Energy, is to ensure that we have a reliable and affordable and clean energy system in the province of Ontario. We're doing that under the mess that was left for us by the previous Liberal government. We have brought electricity prices under control and we're doing the same thing with

natural gas prices, Mr. Speaker. There are programs in place through Enbridge that the member should be passing along to her constituents to be aware of.

But it is interesting to get this kind of a question from the NDP, a party that believes in the highest carbon tax not just in Canada, but in the world. This party is supportive of the federal carbon tax, which on this Enbridge bill that I have here right now is \$50, Mr. Speaker, on a—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** No props. Conclude your answer.

**Hon. Todd Smith:** I will be happy to hand that prop over, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** For a month now, I've been seeing that prop come across my desk in my office. That doesn't say anything to Ontarians that are dealing with rising inflation costs on their heating bills. They deserve solutions—to the minister.

Back to the minister: Last week, Niagara had another large ice storm. People have to heat their homes and there is no way around it. Prices to heat your home are going up and up. People are in desperate trouble.

Charles Christenson, a 67-year-old retired manufacturing worker from St. Catharines, showed me his bill: an increase of \$100 from six months ago. This is a senior on a fixed income, making only \$1,500 a month. We owe it to our seniors that built our province and to all Ontarians to have a solution, especially when it already exists for electricity.

Speaker, to the Premier: Does the Premier, or anyone else on that side of the aisle, believe that it's okay to stand by and do nothing as gas rates double in the middle of the winter and continue to push seniors and young families right to the brink?

**Hon. Todd Smith:** Mr. Speaker, I think it's important for the member opposite and all members of the Legislature to understand that the commodity price for gas has gone up significantly over the last year, in large part because of the unprovoked invasion by Russia in Ukraine. However, gas prices are coming down; natural gas prices are coming down in Ontario.

It's pretty rich, though, for the NDP to talk about affordability when it comes to energy prices. This is a party that wants us to get rid of natural gas. It thinks that natural gas is a bad thing, when more than 76% of homeowners out there are heating their homes with natural gas. This is a party that also supported the previous Liberal government every step of the way in their Green Energy Act, something that was driving up electricity prices by 10%, 11% year over year. We brought that to an end.

It's also a party that doesn't believe in nuclear, Mr. Speaker. It's a party that believes that the source of energy in our province providing 60% of our electricity every day should be phased out.

We're not going to take any lessons—

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

The next question.

## HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I want to ask the Minister of Health about her plan to use for-profit clinics to deal with the backlog of surgeries. It seems to me, looking at Bill 60, that a crucial linchpin is the director, who checks licence applications, does inspections and revokes licences for those who break the rules. But whereas in the existing legislation, the director has to be a public servant, an employee of the ministry, under this government's new Bill 60, the director could be anybody or any "entity." It looks like Bill 60 is setting up to have this government delegate oversight of this industry to some unspecified entity.

As it happens, the current Independent Health Facilities Program is run out of my riding of Kingston and the Islands. My constituents deserve to know how many experienced and qualified staff will lose their jobs to some as yet undisclosed entity?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak about Bill 60. If I understand the member's question accurately, it is that we as a government are making an investment in community surgical and diagnostic units, and they are concerned that we are going to use fewer people to make those assessments, overviews and, ultimately, oversight. There's a bit of a disconnect there.

1110

I am happy that we finally are formalizing a process that patients have asked for for a long time, which is that we need timely access to diagnostic and surgery options in communities. We have, through Bill 60, a process that will ensure those applications will be assessed and reviewed based on needs, based on backlog, based on waiting lists, and they will be placed in appropriate communities that have those challenges. We will do that with oversight that ensures, through a licensing process and a renewal process, that oversight is there for the clinics, but most importantly for the patients.

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

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Mr. Speaker, clearly this government hasn't figured out to whom or to what entity it will delegate the management and oversight of the for-profit surgery industry. That's a red flag for me.

How do we know that this government isn't going to set things up so that people too close to industry are the ones in charge of licenses and inspections? This is a danger in so many industries. There's a term for it: regulatory capture. It's a lot easier to separate the regulator and the industry in the current situation, where the regulators are ministry employees—not anymore with Bill 60.

How can the minister ensure that there won't be people going back and forth between the industry and the directorate in charge of licensing and inspecting for-profit surgical clinics?

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** The member opposite is missing two very important pieces when he talks about the expansion of surgical and diagnostic in community, and that is, of course, that for-profit and hospital partnerships

are a critical part of the application process. As we find the innovation—that is happening in Ottawa right now, as an example—we can see where hospitals working in community, with community partners, are actually providing a higher and faster level of service.

I'm proud of the work of Bill 60 that is going to ensure that oversight piece, and I look forward to the member's insights and input during committee.

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** As per the Toronto Region Board of Trade report, gridlock is a fact of life in the GTA, and if we do not address it, it is going to cost us over \$15 billion by 2031 in lost productivity.

Efficient and convenient transit is essential to support economic and community growth in Ontario. For too long, people in my riding of Mississauga–Malton have not had the public transit they need and deserve. Well, Mr. Speaker, we would not have been in this position if the previous Liberal government had not ignored the transit needs of individuals and families across our province. With 300,000 new Canadians coming to Ontario, the situation is going to be even worse.

Thankfully, we have a government with an ambitious plan for transportation improvement, and we must continue to make strategic investments. Mr. Speaker, my question to the government is: Can you provide an update on the progress of the Eglinton Crosstown West Extension, which will better connect Mississauga to Toronto?

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I appreciate the question from the honourable member. Under the leadership of former Mayor McCallion, Mississauga really saw such explosive growth, both in terms of people who wanted to live there, economic prosperity. Unfortunately, the transit and transportation system in the region did not keep pace with the growth that happened there and continues to happen because of the hard work of the members of the Progressive Conservative caucus from Mississauga.

He is quite right: The previous government certainly let down the people of Mississauga. But I am very happy to report that the Eglinton Crosstown is doing very, very well, and actually reached a landmark just last week, with about half of the tunnelling done on the Eglinton Crosstown West Extension at Renforth.

Now, look: The people of Mississauga have every reason to be very excited by this. I know how hard the members of provincial Parliament in the Progressive Conservative caucus have worked to expand transit and transportation, because it is an important part of continuing the economic growth and prosperity for the people of Mississauga.

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

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I just want to say thank you to the minister for your support for Mississauga. Team Mississauga absolutely appreciates it.

It is exciting to learn about the exceptional progress we have achieved. This speaks volumes to the strong leadership of the Premier and the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Transportation in delivering on major transit infrastructure in our province.

The area around Renforth Drive and Pearson international airport is the second-largest employment hub in the country.

Rapid, reliable and seamless transit is essential in supporting workers, as well as reducing gridlock and emissions.

Mr. Speaker, the Eglinton Crosstown West extension will effectively provide connections to other transit options. Residents of Mississauga–Malton expect that this project must remain a priority for this government and must be delivered successfully.

Can the government please explain how this transit extension will benefit not only Mississauga–Malton but all Ontarians?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Associate Minister of Transportation.

**Hon. Stan Cho:** Thank you to the member. This is a boring story that is exciting for me, because the Eglinton Crosstown West extension is more than halfway dug, and it's ahead of schedule by four weeks. Speaker, this is going to create 31,000 jobs—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order.

**Hon. Stan Cho:** It is interesting, though, to hear the NDP heckling this progress, because I remember when this Premier introduced the largest transit expansion plan in Canadian history, in 2018. What did the NDP say? They said, "It's a back-of-a-napkin plan. It's never going to happen." And they voted down all of those priority sub-way projects, including the Eglinton West extension, the Yonge North line, the Sheppard East extension, as well as all of the GO network expansion. This is a party that believes in saying no to transit and getting in the way when this government gets shovels in the ground.

This government believes—and we will remain undeterred from the goal of building transit, connecting the grid and getting it done for commuters in Ontario.

## HEALTH CARE

**MPP Jill Andrew:** This Conservative government claims its privatization of health care bill, Bill 60, will give Ontarians more access to health care they need when they need it. The reality is, only those who can afford to pay to play will get the care they need in private clinics and private hospitals. Bill 60 leaves vulnerable patients without deep pockets in dangerous situations where diseases will go undiagnosed and surgeries will be delayed, all while they live in chronic pain and depression as their illnesses get worse.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Why does this Premier believe that access to health care should depend on one's ability to pay?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm going to caution the member on the use of her language. Intemperate language isn't helpful.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order.

The Minister of Health.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** Again, I will say, Bill 60 allows us to expand community and diagnostic centres. So the member opposite's premise to suggest—

*Interjections.*

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

The Minister of Health has the floor.

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** The expansion will actually ensure that the wait times that the member opposite is rightly concerned about will go down, all through a publicly funded health care system that allows you to use your health card, not your credit card.

We want to see those expansions happening in community, because we have seen that they are successful. They mean that patients can get back to their families. They mean that patients can get back to their communities and the workforce quickly.

We want to eliminate the wait-lists. On that, the member opposite and I can agree—I hope.

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

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Speaker, we fix health care with better staffing, better care and better wages. Ask the nurses; they'll tell you today.

Karen Bender is a 73-year-old senior in my community, and she needs eye surgery. She has been told that she'll be waiting eight months to a year and that her vision will get worse, if not completely untreatable, the longer she waits. Karen knows of other seniors who were upsold in private clinics, and she's also aware that the Premier and the Minister of Health admitted that their profitization of health care bill has nothing in it to protect patients like her from extra charges.

So my question is back to the Premier: What advice would this Conservative Premier give Karen and others without deep pockets waiting and desperate for surgery, while they've left our publicly funded surgical operating rooms empty and unstaffed in our province?

1120

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:** I would say to Karen and the individuals who are waiting for surgery that you can thank Premier Ford and our government for expanding cataract surgeries in Ottawa, in Kitchener-Waterloo and Windsor. That will immediately ensure that existing capacity that is in community today right now is able to offer more cataract surgeries in the province of Ontario.

Specifically regarding patients who are concerned that they will be encouraged or forced to use something that they don't want, the publicly funded system has a process in place today. Bill 60 actually expands that so that those individuals who have concerns who are not able to deal

with them in the community are able to go to the Patient Ombudsman, something that does not exist prior to—

*Interjections.*

**Hon. Sylvia Jones:**—Bill 60.

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

The next question.

## HOUSING

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** My question is for the Associate Minister of Housing. For too many Ontarians, finding the right home is all too challenging. Housing affordability is out of reach for many individuals and families. They're struggling to find attainable homes that meet their needs. In January, the Ontario Real Estate Association reported that the average price of a home was just under \$800,000. This price point is out of reach for many Ontarians. Speaker, can the associate minister please share what our government is doing to give back the dream of home ownership to my constituents?

**Hon. Michael Parsa:** I want to thank my honourable colleague from Burlington for the question and all the great work that she does in her riding.

Mr. Speaker, our legislation was clear: The More Homes Built Faster Act was intended to build on previous housing bills to further cut red tape and remove unnecessary barriers that were preventing the construction of new units in Ontario.

One key approach that we're taking is by encouraging density around major transit areas, which will make it easier for Ontarians to take a bus, train or streetcar to and from work, and visit family and friends.

We want Ontarians to have the flexibility when it comes to housing: one that they can afford and one that meets their needs and their budgets. The only way that we can do this is by increasing supply in the areas that make sense, like major transit corridors, which is exactly what our government is doing.

I want to thank the member from Burlington for her strong advocacy when it comes to housing on behalf of her constituents.

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

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** Thank you to the associate minister for the response. It's positive and encouraging to hear that our government is focusing on policies that promote home construction in major transit station areas. We've also heard from first-time home buyers, workers and seniors who are having a difficult time finding a new and affordable place to live that meets their budget. Our government must find solutions to address the need for more housing, so that people at all stages of their lives are able to find a home that is just right for them. Can the minister please explain what our government is doing to make housing affordable?

**Hon. Michael Parsa:** Thanks again to my colleague for the great question.

Study after study is telling us that we are in a housing deficit, but we're ensuring that more supply is created—of

all types—to make sure that home ownership is within reach for more Ontarians; for example, the attainable housing program through the government surplus lands, exploring rent-to-own options and land lease communities.

To make housing more affordable and easier to enter the housing market for Ontarians, our government is increasing the term period for homes located in land lease communities from 21 years to 49 years, which, by extending it over time, will make homes more affordable. In fact, I saw first-hand the life-lease community of Sandycove in the great member's riding of Barrie-Innisfil.

We know more work is needed, and we'll continue to explore more options to make it easier for first-time homebuyers, seniors, young families and future generations to find a place to call home in our province.

## LAND USE PLANNING

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** My question is to the Premier. The government has said that in order for a property to be removed from the greenbelt, it had to meet certain criteria, including that it "must be on or near readily serviceable land."

The chief administrative officer for Durham region wrote this to the minister about the changes to the greenbelt plan and about the lands in Durham slated for removal: "Servicing solutions for these lands have not been developed. No plans have been developed, and downstream infrastructure has not been sized to accommodate extensive development within these areas;

"c. The availability of electricity, and community services to support this growth has not been contemplated in any other plans to date."

Why did the government remove the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve and greenbelt lands in Durham region despite the fact the lands did not meet the government's own removal criteria?

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

**Hon. Steve Clark:** It's too easy in Ontario to oppose housing. We know that. Costs are too high. There are parents and grandparents who are worried that their children and their grandchildren are going to never afford a home that meets their needs within their budget.

The government knows, through the Housing Affordability Task Force, other reports by CMHC, and many others know that we need to get shovels in the ground faster. We posted 15 sites that have the potential of having, as a minimum, 50,000 homes to build upon our More Homes, More Choice plan. The Housing Affordability Task Force gave us a fantastic road map. We took it to the people in June, and we're going to implement it. We're going to implement a housing supply action plan each and every year of a re-elected government under the leadership of Premier Ford.

We need to have more housing. We need to provide that opportunity for that—

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

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Back to the Premier: But interestingly, the Ontario Housing Affordability Task

Force, on page, 10 said that a shortage of land isn't the cause, that land is available "both inside the existing built-up areas and on undeveloped land outside the greenbelts." But I digress.

The province, at its own greenbelt consultation, assured municipalities that "No removal or land exchanges proposed," and, "the government will not consider the removal of any lands from the greenbelt." That was just a year ago. The Durham CAO wrote, "Since the expectation was that the greenbelt was to be protected in perpetuity, servicing solutions for these lands have simply not been developed." The land in Durham doesn't meet the government's own criteria, and the government has promised, "If these conditions are not met, the government will ... return the properties ... to the Greenbelt."

Since our lands aren't serviced or near readily serviceable land, when will the minister return the DRAP lands and Durham greenbelt lands safely to the greenbelt?

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

**Hon. Steve Clark:** I'm sorry the member opposite stopped reading the Housing Affordability Task Force at page 10, because if she had read page 12, she would see recommendation 11, "Support responsible housing growth on undeveloped land, including outside existing municipal boundaries."

We're going to continue to work not just with Durham region but with all 444 municipalities. Almost every day, there's a municipality that's passing a resolution supporting our housing pledge. We're building upon the success of the Housing Affordability Task Force. We're making sure that all municipalities have the tools that they need to get shovels in the ground faster, including looking at those six high-growth regions and ensuring that strong mayor powers are set up for those mayors moving forward.

We've got a lot of work to do, but we're going to be working collaboratively with all 444 municipalities. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we're going—

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

## AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

**M. Andrew Dowie:** Ma question s'adresse à la ministre des Affaires francophones.

De nombreux organismes francophones de l'Ontario ont souffert financièrement pendant la pandémie. Nous savons qu'il est essentiel de maintenir de solides réseaux commerciaux internes alors que nous continuons à soutenir les efforts de reprise économique.

Hier, notre gouvernement a lancé l'édition 2023-2024 du programme de financement sous l'Accord de coopération et d'échanges entre le gouvernement du Québec et le gouvernement de l'Ontario en matière de francophonie. Monsieur le Président, la ministre peut-elle nous dire comment cette entente interprovinciale entre l'Ontario et le Québec contribuera au développement économique de la francophonie ontarienne?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The parliamentary assistant.

**M. Stéphane Sarrazin:** Je remercie mon collègue le député de la circonscription de Windsor–Tecumseh pour cette excellente question.

Notre gouvernement continue d'investir dans de nombreuses initiatives qui visent à renforcer le dynamisme de la communauté francophone de l'Ontario et promouvoir son rayonnement et sa vitalité. C'est dans le cadre du Mois de la Francophonie que nous lançons l'édition 2023-2024 du programme de financement sous l'Accord de coopération et d'échanges entre le gouvernement du Québec et le gouvernement de l'Ontario en matière de francophonie.

1130

En vertu de cette entente interprovinciale, les deux provinces collaborent pour soutenir des projets conjoints qui encouragent le développement de la culture francophone; tirent parti des possibilités de partenariats économiques; et renforcent la compréhension réciproque entre les deux populations. À travers cette entente interprovinciale, les deux gouvernements investissent ensemble jusqu'à 500 000 \$ par an pour soutenir des projets communs.

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

**M. Andrew Dowie:** Merci à l'adjoint parlementaire pour sa réponse.

C'est formidable d'entendre parler d'initiatives qui aident à promouvoir le commerce interprovincial, en particulier tout en faisant la promotion de la langue française. En tant que gouvernement, nous devons encourager les entreprises francophones de l'Ontario et veiller à ce qu'elles demeurent prospères.

Monsieur le Président—par l'adjoint parlementaire—la ministre peut-elle dire à la Chambre ce que notre gouvernement fait d'autre pour soutenir la communauté d'affaires francophone et les entreprises sociales en Ontario?

**M. Stéphane Sarrazin:** En 2022-2023, l'Ontario a investi plus de 265 000 \$ pour soutenir 16 projets conjoints menés par des organismes francophones des deux provinces qui favoriseront l'essor de la francophonie canadienne. Notre gouvernement reconnaît la contribution inestimable de la francophonie au bien-être et à la prospérité de l'Ontario. Et les actions que nous avons posées pour soutenir concrètement la francophonie témoignent de l'engagement profond de notre gouvernement.

La Stratégie de développement économique francophone du gouvernement de l'Ontario propose plusieurs programmes et initiatives pour appuyer le milieu des affaires et les entreprises sociales francophones de l'Ontario, tels que le PAFO, le Programme d'appui à la francophonie ontarienne; l'Entente Canada-Ontario sur les services en français; et la promotion du commerce interprovincial via l'accord Ontario-Québec, qui est au coeur des efforts de coopération de nos deux

gouvernements pour soutenir la francophonie et l'innovation.

#### SMART SERVE ONTARIO

**M. Guy Bourgouin:** Vous savez que le mois de mars est le Mois de la Francophonie. Je veux souhaiter à tous les francophones et les francophiles de la province un beau Mois de la Francophonie.

Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Notre bureau a reçu plusieurs commentaires négatifs envers le contenu du programme Smart Serve de l'Ontario. Des gens très compétents en langue française on même faillit l'examen proposé puisque les questions étaient très ambiguës, embêtantes et très mal posées.

La révision du programme demande un renouvellement de certificat par la fin du mois de juin 2023, et plusieurs gens sont incapables de réussir le cours.

Encore une fois, les francophones sont à un désavantage dans cette province. Qu'est-ce que le gouvernement va faire pour adresser ce problème et assurer un succès juste pour les francophones de cette province?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Attorney General.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'm pleased to have the question. We have spoken off-line, and I'm glad to answer the question publicly.

The Smart Serve program really is world-class, it keeps people safe, and we've been upgrading it over time. It's a product that's been provided to government but not run by government. We have engaged with them in terms of servicing, as you know—some of your colleagues have raised it as well—elderly people, who are less able to do the online, so we're working with that. We're having discussions about the translation, as you've raised before, and we'll continue those discussions.

We are aware of the deadline, and thank you for bringing it forward.

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

**M. Guy Bourgouin:** Merci pour la réponse, monsieur le Ministre. Mais une fois que ce cours est révisé, allez-vous accorder une période d'exemption pour les gens francophones et allez-vous enlever les frais additionnels qui pourraient y suivre pour ceux et celles qui ont échoué plus d'une fois?

**Hon. Doug Downey:** As the member knows, this government is a very practical government and so we will continue to work to make sure that those who have taken the course can requalify. We want to make sure that we have protection for people who come into contact with those who are using the bars, the restaurants and the other services in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to take the moment, the opportunity, to highlight one of the upgrades that we've done through Smart Serve, which is with regard to human trafficking, something very important to this government, to make sure that those on the front lines are educated in

those areas as well. So it's continuous improvement. Thank you for the question.

#### NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** My question is for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Because of previous fragmented environmental and energy policies, jobs were lost in our manufacturing and automotive sectors, and the promised environmental benefits were not realized. Our government believes that Ontario can be both a leader in environmental stewardship and a major manufacturing producer.

In order to cement Ontario's role as a leader in the green technology revolution, our government must work with our northern partners and First Nations communities to secure critical minerals required for future projects. This will ensure that our province is a leader in creating a cleaner, greener future for everyone.

Speaker, could the minister please explain how our government is securing Ontario's place as an environmental and manufacturing leader?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I appreciate the question from the member, and I share his views that action is required now. Canada, in fact, is the only jurisdiction in North America with the critical minerals required to support full EVs. And we're blessed in Ontario with an abundance of natural beauty and, of course, the natural resources we require to support electrification. This Premier, this government, in partnership with municipalities and Indigenous partners, are unlocking that potential. In fact, working with partners in Webequie First Nation and Marten Falls First Nation, we're undertaking a first-of-its-kind partnership that will open the corridor to prosperity and ensure the critical minerals we need to decarbonize—minerals that will fuel Ontario's growing electric vehicle revolution that has supported the \$16 billion this Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, in working with the Premier, has attracted to this province. It is truly historic. This work will bring good jobs to remote and northern communities in the province of Ontario, ensuring green jobs for next-generation Ontarians for—

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

The supplementary question?

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Thank you to the minister for the response. Our government understands that we need to develop and maintain relationships with key stakeholders in order to generate productive solutions. Our government knows that working together with our partners across Ontario, particularly in the north, is critical to securing a greener, cleaner future. Investments made by our government, along with ensuring that our critical minerals are responsibly and ethically sourced, demonstrate our commitment to economic prosperity and respect for our environment.

Speaker, can the minister please provide more information about how these projects will ensure ongoing environmental stewardship while also benefiting Ontarians?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I've had the opportunity to visit the north and see how important Indigenous-led reclamation projects are working hand in hand with industry in the

north to offer jobs, to offer incredible opportunity for the north. Building the critical infrastructure and the links that we need to unlock that potential is a priority of this government. With more electric vehicles on the road, Ontario will continue to be a leader in Canada in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We're doing it by working with industry, with workers—a concept that, unfortunately, previous governments really failed to capitalize on.

For a young worker in the steel sector, like my grandfather, who came here from Italy with no money in his pockets, who worked in the open-hearth blast furnace—they now know that green jobs of the future are going to happen at Dofasco and Algoma as we electrify the arc furnace to secure green jobs for generations to come.

But we're not stopping there; we're building the public transit we need. You know the U with the line crossed through it? The only major jurisdiction that had it—we're building public transit and the subways—

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

#### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Government House leader, I understand, wants to inform the House of the business for next week.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I rise, of course, on standing order 59. I again thank all colleagues for their very effective work for the people of the province of Ontario over the last week, and while I have the floor, I wish, again, the Minister of Finance a very happy birthday.

On Monday, March 6, in the afternoon, we will have opposition day motion number 2 and Bill 46, the Less Red Tape, Stronger Ontario Act.

On Tuesday, March 7, in the morning, we will be debating a bill which will be introduced later today, and we will continue that debate on Tuesday afternoon. In the evening, we will have private member's motion number 27, standing in the name of the member for University–Rosedale.

On Wednesday, March 8, in the morning, we will continue debate on a bill which will be introduced later today. During the afternoon routine, Minister Fullerton will give a ministerial statement on International Women's Day. In the afternoon, we will continue debate on a bill which, again, will be introduced later today. In the evening, we will have private member's Bill 62, standing in the name of the member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

On Thursday, March 9, in the morning and afternoon, we will continue debate on the bill introduced later today, and, in the evening, we will debate Bill 65, standing in the name of the member for Whitby.

#### VISITORS

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

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** I would like to welcome my good friend Mansoor Mirza, a community advocate who has been giving free online mathematics classes to students throughout the pandemic, and also his friends Zafar

Ahmed, Alyson Latour and Jamal Ahmed, who are relatives to legislative page Wyatt Sharpe. Welcome to Queen's Park.

#### BIRTHDAY OF MEMBER'S ASSISTANT

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Peterborough–Kawartha has a point of order.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** I just want to wish a happy 50th birthday to my constituent assistant Andrea back in Peterborough.

**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 1142 to 1300.*

#### REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

##### STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated March 2, 2023, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

*Report deemed adopted.*

#### INTRODUCTION OF GOVERNMENT BILLS

##### BUILDING MORE MINES ACT, 2023

##### LOI DE 2023 VISANT L'AMÉNAGEMENT DE D'AVANTAGE DE MINES

Mr. Pirie moved first reading of the following bill:  
Bill 71, An Act to amend the Mining Act / Projet de loi 71, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les mines.

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

*First reading agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Would the Minister of Mines care to briefly explain his bill?

**Hon. George Pirie:** The proposed An Act to amend the Mining Act would amend the Mining Act and, if passed, the changes will help save mining companies time and money.

Improving the Mining Act will create the conditions for companies to build more mines while maintaining Ontario's environmental standards and duty to consult. These updates will also ensure we have the critical minerals in Ontario necessary to build the supply chain for electric vehicles.

Ontario has some of the world's most mineral-rich deposits, including the Ring of Fire, that house critical minerals used in manufacturing electric vehicles, smart phones, pharmaceuticals and other technologies.

Our government is improving the Mining Act to create the conditions for companies to build more mines efficiently and to help strengthen the made-in-Ontario critical minerals supply chains for critical minerals and electric vehicles.

These changes would make Ontario more competitive, attract new investment to the province, and pave the way for Ontario to become the number one jurisdiction in the world for mineral investment and development.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### HEALTH PROFESSIONALS' WEEK ACT, 2023

#### LOI DE 2023 PROCLAMANT LA SEMAINE DES PROFESSIONNELS DE LA SANTÉ

Mr. Shamji moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to proclaim the third week in June as Health Professionals' Week / Projet de loi 72, Loi proclamant la troisième semaine de juin Semaine des professionnels de la santé.

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

*First reading agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Would the member for Don Valley East want to briefly explain his bill?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** The bill proclaims the third week of June in each year as Health Professionals' Week. It honours the service and sacrifice of all health care workers, including the contributions of over 200 health professionals who work in direct patient contact and also behind the scenes to ensure patients in Ontario get the exceptional care they need.

## PETITIONS

### CLIMATE CHANGE

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** This petition is titled "For Meaningful Climate Action Withdraw Bill 23," and it reads:

"Whereas our planet is undergoing significant warming with adverse consequences for health, for agriculture, for infrastructure and our children's future;

"Whereas the costs of inaction are severe, such as extreme weather events causing flooding and drought;

"Whereas Canada has signed the Paris accord which commits us to acting to keep temperature rise under 1.5 degrees Celsius;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario to withdraw Bill 23 and to create a new bill to meet

our housing needs that is compatible with protecting the greenbelt, creating affordable housing in the current urban boundaries, and meeting our climate targets."

I fully support the petition and will affix my signature to it.

## SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**Mr. Joel Harden:** I want to thank Dr. Sally Palmer from McMaster University for handing this to me. The petition reads:

"Petition to Raise Social Assistance Rates.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and soon \$1,227 for ODSP;

"Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

"Whereas the recent small budget increase of 5% for ODSP still leaves these citizens well below the poverty line, both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to live in this time of" rising "inflation;

"Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a basic income of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

"We, the undersigned ... petition the Legislative Assembly" of Ontario "to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP."

I'm going to pass this along to the Clerks' table with Lindsay.

## HEALTH CARE WORKERS

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario has one of the most dedicated and highly trained health workforces in the world. Over 60,000 new nurses and 8,000 new doctors have registered to work in Ontario; and

"Whereas hiring more health care professionals is the most effective step to ensure Ontarians are able to see a health care provider where and when" they need it; and

"Whereas starting in spring 2023, the government will expand the Learn and Stay grant and applications will open for eligible post-secondary students who enrol in priority programs, such as nursing, to work in under-served communities in the region where they studied after graduation. The program will provide up-front funding for tuition, books and other direct educational costs; and

"Whereas with new as-of-right rules, Ontario will become the first province in Canada to allow health care workers registered in other provinces and territories to



immediately start caring for you, without having to first register with one of Ontario's health regulatory colleges. This change will help health care workers overcome excessive red tape that makes it difficult for them to practise in Ontario;

"Whereas we are investing an additional \$15 million to temporarily cover the costs of examination, application, and registration fees for internationally trained and retired nurses, saving them up to \$1,500 each. This will help up to 5,000 internationally educated nurses and up to 3,000 retired nurses begin working sooner to strengthen our front lines;

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

"To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario continue to build on the progress of hiring and recruiting health care workers."

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#### LAND USE PLANNING

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I have a petition entitled "Stop the 413 GTA West Highway." It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government is pushing ahead with plans to build Highway 413, a redundant and wasteful 400-series highway through the greenbelt that would cost taxpayers an estimated \$10 billion or more; and

"Whereas according to a TorStar/National Observer investigation entitled 'Friends with Benefits?' powerful developers and land speculators with political and donor ties to the Premier and the PC Party of Ontario own thousands of acres along the proposed highway corridor and would profit from its construction, suggesting that this \$10-billion taxpayer-funded highway is about serving the private interests of the Premier's friends and donors, not the public interest; and

"Whereas the Ontario government's expert panel concluded in 2017 that Highway 413 would be a waste of taxpayer money that would only save drivers 30 to 60 seconds on their commutes; and

"Whereas that expert panel identified less costly and less destructive alternatives to new highway construction, such as making better use of the underused Highway 407, just 15 kilometres away; and

"Whereas Highway 413 would pave over 400 acres of greenbelt and 2,000 acres of farmland, destroy the habitats of at-risk and endangered species, and pollute rivers and streams; and

"Whereas building more highways encourages more vehicle use and increases traffic and congestion; and

"Whereas the highway would cause significant harm to historic Indigenous sites;

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

"Stop the plans for building Highway 413."

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

#### SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** This is a petition to raise social assistance rates. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and (soon) \$1,227 for ODSP;

"Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

"Whereas the recent budget increase of 5% for ODSP, with nothing for OW, could be experienced as an insult to recipients, who have been living since 2018 with frozen social assistance rates and a Canadian inflation rate that reached 12%;

"Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a basic income of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

"We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP."

I support this petition. I'll be affixing my name to it and sending it to the Clerks' table with page Harry.

#### SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** I'd like to thank Sally Palmer for sending in these petitions.

This is entitled "Petition to Raise Social Assistance Rates" and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and woefully inadequate to cover the basic costs of food and rent;

"Whereas individuals on the Ontario Works program receive just \$733 per month and individuals on the Ontario Disability Support Program receive just \$1,169 per month, only 41% and 65% of the poverty line;

"Whereas the Ontario government has not increased social assistance rates since 2018, and Canada's inflation rate in January 2022 was 5.1%, the highest rate in 30 years;

"Whereas the government of Canada recognized through the CERB program that a 'basic income' of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

"We, the undersigned ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase social assistance rates to a base of \$2,000 per month for those on Ontario Works and to increase other programs accordingly."

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

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I'd like to thank the many residents of London who signed this petition on affordable housing.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas for families throughout much of Ontario, owning a home they can afford remains a dream, while renting is painfully expensive;

"Whereas consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have sat idle, while housing costs spiralled out of control, speculators made fortunes, and too many families had to put their hopes on hold;

"Whereas every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable housing. Whether a family wants to rent or own, live in a house, an apartment, a condominium or a co-op, they should have affordable options;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to immediately prioritize the repair of Ontario's social housing stock, commit to building new affordable homes, crack down on housing speculators, and make rentals more affordable through rent controls and updated legislation."

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Vedant.

## LAND USE PLANNING

**Ms. Bhutla Karpoche:** This petition is titled "Protect the Greenbelt" and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 23 is the Ford government's latest attempt to remove protected land from the greenbelt, allowing developers to bulldoze and pave over 7,000 acres of farmland in the greenbelt;

"Whereas Ontario is already losing 319.6 acres of farmland and green space daily to development;

"Whereas the government's own Housing Affordability Task Force found there are plenty of places to build homes without destroying the greenbelt;

"Whereas Premier Ford's repeated moves to tear up farmland and bulldoze wetlands have never been about housing, but are about making developers richer;

"Whereas green spaces and farmland are what we rely on to grow our food, support natural habitats and prevent flooding;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately withdraw Bill 23, stop all plans to further remove protected land from the greenbelt and protect existing farmland in the province."

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

## WATER EXTRACTION

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I have a petition entitled "Protect Water as a Public Good.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas groundwater is a public good, not a commodity; and

"Whereas the United Nations recognizes access to clean drinking water as a human right; and

"Whereas local ecosystems must be preserved for the well-being of future generations; and

"Whereas the duty to consult Indigenous communities regarding water-taking within traditional territories is often neglected, resulting in a disproportionate burden on systemically marginalized communities during a period of reconciliation; and

"Whereas a poll commissioned by Wellington Water Watchers found that two thirds of respondents support phasing out bottled water in Ontario over the course of a decade; and

"Whereas a trend towards prioritizing the expansion of for-profit water bottling corporations over the needs of municipalities will negatively impact Ontario's growing communities;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to prioritize public ownership and control of water over corporate interests."

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with page Keira.

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## ORDERS OF THE DAY

REDUCING INEFFICIENCIES ACT  
(INFRASTRUCTURE STATUTE LAW  
AMENDMENTS), 2023LOI DE 2023 SUR LA RÉDUCTION  
DES INEFFICACITÉS (MODIFIANT  
DES LOIS SUR LES INFRASTRUCTURES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 2, 2023, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 69, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to infrastructure / Projet de loi 69, Loi modifiant diverses lois sur les infrastructures.

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

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** It's a pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill 69, the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, tabled by the Minister of Infrastructure.

This bill has two schedules, one about the Environmental Assessment Act and one that addresses infrastructure, specifically in relation to the real estate portfolio of government agencies.

The first schedule will directly affect how we protect the environment in this province, and I share the hesitation that has been voiced by my colleagues in the official opposition on how this bill will impact the process of environmental assessments. I think that hesitation is justified, given a long list of transgressions against the environment that this government has committed. When this government comes forward with a bill with very little communication, no briefing for the opposition before we begin debating, that directly impacts the future environmental

well-being of this province, I don't have much confidence that this government will utilize this legislation with the best of intentions, and I don't think Ontarians have much confidence either.

The process of environmental assessments is one of the only things that stands between projects proposed by this government and the destruction of this province's green spaces, waterways and climate. The concern that I and my colleagues in the Ontario NDP have with this piece of legislation is that it could allow the process of environment assessments to be circumvented, and we believe we need those assessments in order to protect the province's environment. We have this concern because this government has demonstrated time and time again that protecting Ontario's environment is not high on their list of priorities; in fact, the opposite is true. They have shown that they cannot be trusted when it comes to the protection of our environment or doing land deals in the interest of the public and of our collective future.

This bill allows the environment minister to waive the 30-day waiting period that is currently a requirement that projects must go through following the end of a class environmental assessment comment period. Projects must go through this before being granted approval to proceed. Taking this 30-day waiting period off the table is taking away another protection for our environment, as its purpose is to ensure that the minister has enough time to adequately consider public comments. These comments have the potential to lead to a recommendation of further assessments or may even result in the class environmental assessment being upgraded to a full environmental assessment. So getting rid of this waiting period means that the minister does not see any reason or value in spending time considering public input on environmental projects.

Speaker, I can see that in situations where there are no comments submitted or all the comments submitted are in support of a project, maybe waiving the 30-day waiting period would allow a project to proceed without further delay and that could benefit an important project's timeline. I can wrap my head around that specific situation. What I cannot understand is how this government would think that we would believe that that is all they will use this legislation for, when we have seen repeatedly that this government has disdain for the very principle of public consultation, especially when it comes to the environment.

Schedule 1 of this bill would pave the way for this government to ignore public input without even having to pretend that they care, and further separate public participation and decisions that directly impact the environment.

We have seen time and time again that what this government puts forward as simply an option, for the minister to waive the 30-day period, soon becomes regular and routine practice.

This government can say that all they are trying to do is to remove red tape, but that is not the case. They have twice been found in violation of the Environmental Bill of Rights by Ontario courts for taking away rights that guarantee that the public is notified and consulted on matters affecting the environment, as well as having their comments considered before a government decision is made. We have seen through multiple situations and scenarios

blasted across newspaper headlines that this government is always fighting with the public, fighting against their right to be notified and to have input on how decisions are made, and how this government uses not only taxpayer dollars but the land within this province—the land that is our collective heritage.

These two instances where courts found this government in violation of the Environmental Bill of Rights are not the end of this government's troubles with the Environmental Bill of Rights.

The Auditor General, in her most recent report, began by summarizing the Environmental Bill of Rights as follows: "30 years ago, Ontario had laws in place to protect the environment, but there was growing public concern about whether those laws offered sufficient protection. Paired with this was diminishing public confidence in the government to protect and provide environmental sustainability. The Environmental Bill of Rights ... was enacted in response to these concerns.

"The EBR Act recognizes that, while the primary responsibility for protecting the environment lies with government, ordinary Ontarians should have a means to ensure that this is being achieved in an effective, timely, open and fair manner. The EBR Act gives each person the right to participate in, and hold government accountable for, its environmentally significant decisions...."

The Auditor General followed this summary by warning that the government was yet again in violation of the Environmental Bill of Rights because they passed Bill 109 while public consultations were still ongoing.

In a surprise to no one, the Auditor General said this government may be in violation of the Environmental Bill of Rights yet again by passing Bill 23 while public consultations for multiple schedules within that bill were still under way.

Let me tell you, Speaker, the public wanted an opportunity to speak on Bill 23, but their concerns were unheard by this government. My office was flooded with emails and phone calls and walk-ins on Bill 23. Many community organizations in Ottawa requested an opportunity to provide insight to this government, but when they did, their requests and their concerns were ignored.

Because of the complexity of Bill 23, organizations such as the Federation of Citizens' Associations of Ottawa asked that the government take the time needed to listen to more stakeholders affected by the bill, to consider the impact on the environment, and to continue to allow conservation authorities to comment on development applications if requested by the city. But this government was more focused on their plan to push this through without any consultation than they were on actually listening to the public.

Now we're seeing a similar story here. The government is more focused on pushing this through with as little input as possible, because they don't care to listen to those who will be affected by this bill, just as they want to ignore public comment on real concerns following a class environmental assessment process or recommendations for a full environmental assessment on proposed projects.

If this government is confused at all as to why the public may be concerned, maybe they should consider the fact that the effects of climate change are becoming more present than ever. In Ottawa, the Rideau Canal Skateway did not open for the first time in its 53-year history this year, after an extremely mild winter with higher-than-average temperatures. This is deeply concerning. The Rideau Canal Skateway is emblematic of Ottawa. It brings in thousands of tourists and supports small businesses throughout the winter months, and now we are living with the possibility of not knowing whether it will open winter after winter. The National Capital Commission is working with people at Carleton University and the University of Ottawa, trying to find creative ways for us to get it open, to create ice sooner, or to create ice that is strong enough to support thousands of skaters—despite Ottawa being known as one of the coldest capitals in the world. And yet, this government would much prefer to remove environmental assessments and exacerbate the effects of climate change, rather than work harder to prevent it.

My riding was also devastated by the derecho that struck last May and left tens of thousands of people without power for up to 10 days across Ottawa West–Nepean. It devastated the tree canopy of Ottawa West–Nepean. It took out people’s roofs and cars. It was incredibly destructive.

In the last five years, my riding has also lived through two once-in-a-century floods, displacing many residents and destroying many homes.

And in 2018, a tornado hit Ottawa West–Nepean, again leaving residents without power, destroying many homes and trapping others in their homes.

Speaker, this government continues to fail in addressing climate change in the province, and my constituents are suffering the effects of it. How many more once-in-a-century floods, wind disasters or extreme weather events will it take for this government to take climate change seriously?

A constituent who wrote to my office when this government was pushing through Bill 23 and Bill 39 rightly pointed out that biodiversity loss and climate change are existential threats, hitting us particularly hard over the past few years. The majority of our wetlands have been lost, paved over, and the list of endangered species continues to grow. This constituent is one of many constituents who have reached out to me and to the government, imploring this government to engage with the public, with Indigenous partners, municipalities, conservation authorities and civil society stakeholders to support development that is in line with pre-existing protections and actually acknowledge climate change as a threat here in Ontario.

**1330**

With this demonstrated contempt for the Environmental Bill of Rights, it is not surprising that when you look back on this government’s record on the environment, you find a long list of decisions that undermine environmental assessments.

In 2020, the government weakened the Environmental Assessment Act with Bill 197, an omnibus bill, where they

slipped in amendments where they made it so that many projects that previously were subject to public and ministerial oversight now have little to no public input.

One of the best examples of this, which just proves how much this government can’t be trusted on environmental affairs, is their current record on carving up the greenbelt under the guise of providing more homes to Ontarians. In a report released this week, it was found that Ontario has more than enough land to build two million homes without carving into the greenbelt, yet this government continues to bulldoze their way through criticism, ignoring the facts that are being presented to them.

It is incredibly distressing that this government has proposed the removal of over 7,000 acres of protected lands in the greenbelt. The greenbelt is meant to protect Ontario’s farmland and green spaces, which are precious and part of a sustainable future. Once this land is paved over, we won’t be able to recover it. However, yet again we are seeing this government’s attempt to carve it up to benefit their developer buddies.

Ontario’s green spaces and farmlands have continuously been in this government’s crosshairs, and they have been very consistent in introducing legislation, such as Bill 69, that will undermine the processes this province has in place to ensure that land and green space and water are protected and that if there are developments being proposed, they are done so within a time frame that allows for community participation.

This government has also been known to abuse ministerial zoning orders, which allow the province to bypass local planning rules in order to expedite developments—and using them to push through deals for developers, instead of listening and appropriately responding to the feedback and opposition from local communities.

As was said in a CBC News article published last year, “A minister’s zoning order, or MZO, is a trump card that lets the province immediately authorize development and bypass local planning rules to expedite what it wants built”—and use this trump card they did, so much so that they were criticized not just by the official opposition, but by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, who said that these orders were intended to be used sparingly, not how this government was using them when they doubled the total amount of MZOs over two years compared to the previous 18 years. This audit concluded with the mention of a lack of transparency, something this government has become well known for.

This government is also currently surrounded by criticism over spending \$650 million of public money in order to simply give away a piece of Ontario Place. And who are they giving it to? A for-profit company based out of Austria.

I bring up these examples because they demonstrate that this government can say their legislation intends to do one thing when, in reality, it is aimed at further muddying the waters of public insight in order to push through their agenda, which usually involves big opportunities and payouts to their biggest backers.

This bill will also allow the Ministry of Infrastructure to control real estate interests of prescribed entities that presently manage their own real estate interests—things such as property ownership and lease agreements. We can assume that with this bill, these real estate services will be under the control of Infrastructure Ontario, which is currently the purveyor of real estate services for most government properties. Within this part of the bill, the government claims they are responding directly to the Auditor General's 2017 report on real estate services. That report criticized the bad management of government properties and focused its critique on Infrastructure Ontario. It did not discuss the management of agencies such as Agricorp and EQAO. These are the agencies that Infrastructure Ontario will assume control over with this bill, which completely misses the point of the 2017 report.

The 2017 Auditor General's report stated: "Our audit determined that Infrastructure Ontario's management of government properties was impacted in part by weaknesses in the enterprise realty service agreement ... between Infrastructure Ontario and the Ministry of Infrastructure. The agreement does not set out any mandatory, minimum standard of performance for managing the costs of capital projects. It also does not set out timelines for meeting the accommodation standard for office space designed to ensure that existing government properties are used efficiently, and timelines for maintaining the state of government-owned properties to the agreement's standard."

The report then went on to suggest that there are many opportunities for savings within the current structure, such as:

- “reducing the square footage in government office space to meet the 2012 office accommodation standard of 180 rentable square feet per person;

- “more effectively disposing of vacant buildings that were incurring carrying costs; and

- “revising future AFP agreements to better support hospitals in obtaining cost-effective maintenance agreements.”

The Auditor General concluded her report by stating, “Infrastructure Ontario could maintain government properties more cost-effectively by better overseeing the companies that it has engaged to provide most capital repair and property management services to ensure costs for capital repairs and property management services are reasonable and projects are completed on time. As well, existing government properties could be used more efficiently, with people occupying less space per person. The agreement between Infrastructure Ontario and the Ministry of Infrastructure needs better performance standards to incentivize Infrastructure Ontario to manage and maintain government properties more cost-effectively.

“We also found that the alternative financing and procurement maintenance framework often did not support the cost-effective management of building maintenance and hospitals that was intended when the arrangements were structured.”

With this information, coupled with the fact that Infrastructure Ontario does not actually directly manage government real estate—it instead outsources property management to private contractors—and the fact that the report quoted above focuses on criticism of Infrastructure Ontario's uncompetitive and poor oversight of private contracts, we don't actually know what problem this bill is meant to be solving.

The Auditor General went further in her criticism of Infrastructure Ontario and how Infrastructure Ontario continues to award contracts to private providers that had in the past demonstrated poor performance: “One private sector company with a history of poor performance is still being awarded new contracts by Infrastructure Ontario—Infrastructure Ontario does not have a formalized performance evaluation program of private sector companies during the maintenance phase of the AFP contract, and new AFP contracts are awarded without consideration of past performance. This has resulted in companies with past poor performance receiving contracts. For example, one private sector company that has been in dispute with a hospital since 2013 over what work is included in the AFP agreement was awarded contracts—in 2016 for \$1.3 billion and in 2017 for \$685 million—to design, build, finance and maintain two more hospitals. The dispute is still ongoing.”

It definitely does not solve the issues revealed in the Auditor General's 2017 report. In fact, this bill may make the issues highlighted even worse than before.

The press release that the government put out when introducing this bill explicitly claims that Bill 69 “will address the 2017 Auditor General's report and other third-party reports that have identified opportunities for the province to deliver the real estate portfolio more efficiently through initiatives that centralize authority and decision-making.”

However, as we've seen from the conclusions made by the Auditor General in her 2017 report, the 2017 report did not reference the poor management of agencies such as EQAO and Agricorp. Instead, it criticized the poor management of the government's real estate portfolio by Infrastructure Ontario itself and made 14 recommendations on how Infrastructure Ontario could, with more cost-effectiveness and better oversight, better maintain government properties. There was no recommendation made by the Auditor General in 2017 that references handing over control of these agencies' real estate interests for Infrastructure Ontario to manage.

So, once again, we are left wondering why the government read this report and concluded that the Auditor General was calling for a resolution that the Auditor General was not calling for, instead of actually addressing the real problem.

I'd like to conclude by urging that the government actually address the real problem and take urgent action on climate change.

I just want to share one little anecdote, to conclude. In 2018, when we were told that there were only 12 years left to prevent catastrophic climate change, the daughter of a

friend, who was 12 years old at that time, broke down in tears and asked her mom, “Why don’t the grown-ups care about our future?” I think about that every day with regard to my own children—that this is the world that we’re leaving them, that they are growing up in.

I would really like the government to take seriously the world that we’re passing on to our children and actually address climate change, instead of trying to undermine environmental assessments at every turn.

1340

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions?

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, Bill 69 will reduce red tape, optimize office space, improve economic growth and save taxpayers’ money. This is what our government has been doing since 2018. We’re cutting down red tape. We’re cutting down the regulations. We’re creating an environment for businesses to come and invest in Ontario.

As the Premier has said many times, governments do not create jobs; governments create an environment for businesses to come and invest in Ontario. When they invest in Ontario, they will create jobs, and when businesses thrive, Ontarians will thrive.

My question to the member opposite is, why doesn’t the NDP want to reduce red tape?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** There were a lot of buzzwords in that question. But I certainly agree with the member opposite that this government has a track record, and that track record is what I just spent 20 minutes outlining. It is a track record of undermining environmental assessments, undermining our green spaces and our waterways, undermining the future of our children.

Let me tell you, the government has done a great job of creating jobs cleaning up from natural disasters. But we could create a lot of jobs by investing in retrofits, building more sustainable infrastructure for our communities and things that would actually prevent and reverse climate change and help us to build more sustainable communities, which would allow my children and everyone’s children to have a healthy future in our province.

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

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I would like to thank the member from Ottawa West–Nepean for her excellent presentation showing how Bill 69 is actually creating a loophole that undermines or even negates the Environmental Bill of Rights.

It seems that this government is a government of backroom deals and escape hatches when you look at Bill 28—the bill that never was but never was—the “notwithstanding” clause, MZO, Bill 124, and now Bill 69.

You talked about the Auditor General’s 2017 report, and you pointed out how Infrastructure Ontario management was ineffective, with no standards of performance, and that there were no timelines. It has even been pointed out that invoices were non-specific and did not have proper addresses on them—so it wasn’t necessarily as though these invoices were even related to the properties that were being managed.

My question: Is it fiscally prudent or socially responsible to give further contracts to Infrastructure Ontario?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thanks to the member from London North Centre for such a great question.

No, it’s not at all fiscally prudent to keep giving an organization that has such an incredibly poor track record contracts. And it hasn’t been great management on the part of that organization to keep outsourcing contracts to companies with incredibly poor performance. In fact, one starts to wonder after a while if the point of the contracts is not the actual work being done, but who is on the other end receiving the money for the contracts—which is another pattern recurring with this government that we have seen.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions?

**Mr. Rob Flack:** I enjoyed the member opposite’s comments, but I’m a little bit confused, I will admit. I’ve just read the bill, sitting here, in detail, and a lot of what you’re debating—respectfully, I understand your opinions—I don’t think is fully applicable to this bill.

Again, when we see “reducing inefficiencies”—I think we would all agree that the easiest thing to spend in the world is somebody else’s money, the taxpayers’ money. I know with this government, this Premier and our ministers—what the Minister of Infrastructure is trying to do is to reduce the red tape and cut costs.

As I said—through Bill 63—we can’t cut our way to prosperity, but we can be more lean, we can be more efficient.

I am still a little bit confused, again, why the opposition wants to make sure that we are not going to be as efficient as possible. Why does the NDP want to spend more taxpayer dollars, when I think that we’re spending more than we need to right now? We’re going to invest dollars, in this government. Why do you want to spend more money inefficiently?

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** I thank the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for the question.

I will try to clear up your confusion efficiently for you.

I think one of the most inefficient ways of spending taxpayer money is to spend it on an organization that is not delivering good oversight, is not delivering good value for the citizens of Ontario—and what we saw in the Auditor General’s report is that Infrastructure Ontario has clearly not been doing that. We’ve repeatedly seen occasions where outsourcing by the government has led to incredibly inefficient management of services. It results in money going into people’s pockets; it has not resulted in better services for Ontarians.

This government’s love of P3s also frequently results in inefficient services for the people of Ontario—once again, money going into private pockets and incredibly inefficient oversight. If the member has any doubts about that, I would love for him to come to Ottawa and ride on our train that was built as a P3 and does not have round wheels and has doors that do not open in the heat or the cold.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions?

**Mr. Joel Harden:** I want to thank the member for Ottawa West–Nepean for that excellent presentation.

I'm wondering if she could elaborate again on the derecho and how that impacted our community. I understand that our friends, through this bill, are wanting to be reducing the capacity for environmental assessment, but sometimes, it would seem to me—and I welcome what you think about this—that when we reduce the capacity to properly assist environmental risk, we invite incredible costs down the road. The derecho cost Ontario \$875 million—that is the sixth most expensive storm in our history—and our own city \$19.5 million. So are we achieving efficiencies in the short run for huger costs down the road? I'm just wondering if you have Ottawa West–Nepean stories about this.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thanks to the member from Ottawa Centre for that great question.

I would also add to that that our city of Ottawa is still waiting for our expenses from that storm to be reimbursed by the province. I can tell you, it's incredibly inefficient for the city to have to clean up after such a major storm. It was incredibly expensive for the residents of Ottawa West–Nepean to have to rebuild their roofs, to purchase new vehicles. For many of them, it cost the entire contents of their freezers and fridge; for many others, there was an incredible cost in trauma and psychological suffering, because they were trapped in their own homes.

We've seen this government, just recently, refuse to require generators that would allow people to get in and out of their own homes in the case of these storms.

We've also seen, with the floods in Ottawa, that allowing people to have homes built on hundred-year flood plains results in having homes that are eventually flooded.

That is why it is valuable to have an environmental assessment done—so that you are not building your homes and your buildings and your roads in places that are going to be destroyed by climate events.

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

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you for the passionate presentation by the Ottawa West–Nepean member.

Since 2018, the PC government has been focused on building Ontario. We have built schools. The previous Liberal-NDP coalition closed schools. We are building hospitals. The Liberal-NDP coalition brought our health care system to its knees. We are building transit, with four new transit lines in the GTA—when the NDP voted no.

Bill 69 will help—predictable infrastructure projects and let us build infrastructure faster without compromising the EA process.

Why are the members opposite against building the infrastructure that the people of Ontario need and deserve? Why doesn't the opposition want to join us in building Ontario?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

*Interjections.*

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you, Speaker. I feel like I'm getting lots of cheers and applause from outside. It's a fun background to answer questions against.

Thank you to the member for the question.

He's absolutely right; this government has a track record. It's a track record of undermining environmental assessments, of undermining our green spaces and our waterways and our clean air at every turn.

There is absolutely no future for the province of Ontario if we don't have green space, if we don't have farmland, if we don't have clean water, and if we don't take action to stop irreversible and catastrophic climate change.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** That concludes our questions and responses for this round.

**1350**

Further debate? I recognize the member for Oakville.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you, Speaker. It's always a pleasure to have you in the chair, and it's good to be here this afternoon.

It's my pleasure to address this House today to speak about the importance of moving forward with the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, 2023, which was introduced earlier this week by my colleague the honourable Minister of Infrastructure. This bill confirms our government's commitment made to all Ontarians in the last election, and that was a commitment to enhance fiscal management, practise good governance, save taxpayer dollars and cut red tape—and I did say “red tape.” There's a reason why that tape is coloured red. It could be orange, it could be green—anyway, it's called “red tape.” We're here to eliminate some of that red tape.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** We could change the term. We'll have to get that out there.

Speaker, specifically, this legislation is taking the necessary steps to modernize the previous Ministry of Infrastructure Act, 2011, along with nine other relevant acts.

But the core objective with introducing the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, 2023, addresses the reason we were all sent to this House. I have spoken in this House on many occasions to advocate the belief that we're all here to serve our community. It makes no difference what office in government or which public service entity we hold; there always has been and only will be one taxpayer.

The fundamental principle of practising fiscal prudence with public funds, cutting red tape and practising good governance is what we need now and what was sorely lacking from the previous Liberal government. That is what the voters in Ontario overwhelmingly elected our government to do—and that's our job: to fulfill their wishes to get it done. So the question is, where do we start?

As this proposed legislation would modernize government process and oversight, the first phase of this plan would be to improve the management of real estate and enhance fiscal management, specifically with a focus on the entities that primarily hold already-used office space.

Currently, Ontario has one of the largest and most complex real estate portfolios in Canada. Real estate and industry experts have told us that it is the complexity of

this portfolio that has been one of the contributing factors towards unnecessary delays, duplication, higher fees, and overwhelming confusion amongst the public.

The Auditor General's report from 2017, along with other third-party reports, outlined several inefficiencies within the current structure at the time, but it also outlined opportunities for the provincial government of the day to deliver the real estate portfolio in a more efficient and cost-effective method. The Auditor General recommended a more centralized process and decision-making model that, under the authority of the Ministry of Infrastructure, would improve the management of real estate assets owned by the crown. The Auditor General, at the time, understood that by centralizing the management of the real estate portfolio with the Ministry of Infrastructure—which, by the way, has the expertise to manage it—the government can reduce unnecessary administrative burdens and costs and ultimately save the taxpayers money. The framework, which is outlined in this bill and recommended by the Auditor General, would modify the real estate authority of 14 entities and provide the Minister of Infrastructure with control of real estate that was previously under these entities.

For the benefit of my colleagues in the House, I would like to clarify some changes to the Ministry of Infrastructure Act, 2011—in particular, a new section, 11.0.1, that would be added to the act—and how section 22 of the current act would be repealed and replaced with a new section 22 of the act.

The new section, 11.0.1, would provide that a prescribed entity is not entitled to hold or control, or acquire by purchase, ease or otherwise any interest in real property, such as:

- any land, building or structures;
- any interests in land, building or structures;
- any fixtures or interests in fixtures installed, or placed in, or used in or in connection with land, buildings or structures.

The new section 22 of the act would set out new regulation-making powers for the Minister of Infrastructure and for the Lieutenant Governor in Council in connection with the new section 11.0.1 of the act. The minister would be authorized to make regulations prescribing entities for the purpose of the new section 11.0.1 of the act, as well as prescribing exceptions, conditions, limitations or restrictions in connection with the new section.

The Reducing Inefficiencies Act is, in some ways, interconnected with other important bills our government has introduced since being elected to office in 2018. As discovered from one of the many findings from the Minister of Red Tape Reduction, moving forward with the Reducing Inefficiencies Act is the right decision and direction for our government to move our province forward.

Speaker, our government has introduced legislation that will build 1.5 million new homes over the next 10 years.

We have introduced legislation that will invest in new infrastructure projects such as highways, bridges, waterways and public transit.

As well, we have introduced legislation that will reduce red tape and high taxes that burdened business and

crippled growth in Ontario from 2003 to 2018. During that time period, manufacturing jobs left the province of Ontario in droves. They left because there was a government that was not committed to helping and supporting businesses, particularly manufacturing businesses. They had written off manufacturing as something we don't need to be a part of here in the province of Ontario—"let's just focus on service." Yet nothing could be further from the truth—and today is a witness, as we rebuild our manufacturing sector and are undergoing a manufacturing renaissance in the province of Ontario right now.

This bill, if passed, will be critical in that plan to continue rebuilding Ontario. That is why our government continues to take decisive action to move our province in the right direction. The Reducing Inefficiencies Act, 2023, is one of the solutions that is needed.

I would like to recap for this House similar red tape reduction legislation that has had similar outcomes that this bill will have. Our government has introduced and passed eight red tape reduction bills. We have taken 400 individual actions to reduce Ontario's total regulatory burden. To date, our red tape reduction efforts have saved businesses and organizations \$576 million each and every year in compliance costs. This is helping to make our province a better place to live, work, raise a family, start a business.

When our government took office in 2018, the province of Ontario was not only the most indebted sub-sovereign government in the entire world, thanks to Liberal and NDP overspending, but it also had the most regulations—over 300,000—of any jurisdiction in the world. By comparison, British Columbia has 180,000 regulations. There's no need for our province to have almost double the number of regulations. BC is a great place to live, work and raise a family—Ontario does not need 300,000. We need to support and encourage businesses to come here and people to live in this great province, so eliminating a lot of these burdensome, duplicative regulations is setting the province on the right path.

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As the goal of this bill is to enhance Ontario's fiscal management, cut red tape and improve good governance, it only makes sense to move forward and pass this bill.

It is also worth noting that this bill will look at how we can reduce the administrative burden on standard infrastructure projects while maintaining our province's strong environmental and consultative processes.

Our government has and will continue to meet with municipalities, First Nations, local stakeholder groups and subject matter experts to ensure that all proposed changes will be in the best interests of all Ontarians and are consistent with our government's plan to build.

One identified efficiency this proposed legislation would implement is to formalize an existing mechanism that waives the 30-day waiting period after a successful class environmental assessment has been fully completed and consulted on. This recommendation would allow the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, on a project-specific basis, the authority to alter or waive the 30-day waiting period for class environmental assessment projects.



If you are wondering what a class environmental assessment is, it is defined as a simplified process that sets out requirement for consultation, impact assessment and mitigation for projects such as municipal roads, sewers and drainage.

The government of Ontario and the Minister of the Environment take the beauty of this province and the environment very seriously, and I want to stress and underline, contrary to the messaging of the opposition, that there are no changes to the environmental assessment. This assessment process that we currently have in place is 50 years old. The Minister of the Environment, this morning, mentioned in his speech that he wasn't even born when this particular assessment process was put into place—probably half of the members in this Legislature weren't born; I was, but I was young.

So why are we doing this? Why are we modernizing? Because like so many other government policies and processes, the existing assessment is too slow, too costly and too burdensome. We have a problem in this province when people who want to build infrastructure, build homes for people to live in, build condos, high-rises, single detached homes—when they are not able to get shovels in the ground for 10 years from the time they first purchased that land, that is part of the problem. That is going to drive up prices. It's pretty simple math. Holding multi-million dollar real estate portfolios over many years costs money. It delays building of houses. It makes it more unaffordable. It's not good.

We need to speed up the process within the constraints of keeping the same environmental assessments in place. Formalizing this ability means that standard municipal projects that occur across the province, like the creation of new municipal roads and stormwater infrastructure, could be ready almost a month earlier than were previously completed before.

Again, I want to emphasize, contrary to some of the messaging from the opposition, that there is no change to the environmental assessment. We are eliminating duplicative and unnecessary regulations, period.

In implementing these proposed changes, we will get more projects built faster, at a lower cost to Ontarians. And who would not want more housing, more transit built quicker and more efficiently? Most importantly, these projects will be completed without compromising any environmental standards and protections that are currently in place.

This is a perfect example of how streamlining the process will save municipalities and taxpayers both time and money for essential projects that are needed and that will help build Ontario. That is our objective. As a government, we have put forward the most bold plan to build infrastructure in this province in decades, and it cuts across different facets of infrastructure. Whether it's stormwater pond projects, water facilities, public transit, the electrification of the GO line, new subway lines, highways, bridges, it's all part of the package; it's not an either/or.

We want to encourage people to take public transit when we can. We want them to take the GO train, the TTC, Oakville Transit, Brampton Transit. But we also recognize that not everybody can always take their kids to soccer

practice or go see their friends in the other part of the city on transit. Sometimes they're going to need to take a car. If they have a car, we want them to go on less congested roads. We want businesses to be able to get products closer to market quicker, sooner, with more efficiency and less traffic. And we would love them to be buying and supporting and driving electric vehicles, which is why our government has been committed to making Ontario a global hub in making electric vehicles right here in this province.

The Speaker will know that in his own region of Halton, in the town of Oakville, Ford of Canada will be retooling their facility in the next couple of years to build electric vehicles. I can tell you that Ford of Canada was very close in considering moving their facility elsewhere and shutting down that facility. Why? Because of the actions of the past Liberal government—high energy costs, high regulations. Our government has come in and worked in collaboration, I might add, with the federal government to be able to support Ford of Canada to stay here for decades to come, to build electric vehicles, to have great, high-paying jobs and build vehicles that are great for the environment.

We would rather build electric vehicles right here in this province than spend money subsidizing millionaires, buying vehicles built in California. That's the way we work in this government. We want vehicles built here in Canada, here in Ontario, and we're going to support those businesses and create that environment for them to be built here.

As someone mentioned, as well, we have the critical minerals, and we're going to need to build the infrastructure to get to those critical minerals over the years so we can create that wealth and prosperity for our province in all regions, especially some of the less developed regions where they need it the most, and we certainly hope the opposition will support us in that.

We're confident that this bill will be part of the process. It's not the only bill that's going to move Ontario forward, but it's part of the process; it's part of a package from the government.

Earlier this week, we saw all members from both sides of the House come together like true parliamentarians and do what is best for Ontario.

And what is best for all Ontarians? I believe it is to fulfill our promise to practise good governance and fiscal responsibility, to eliminate duplication and waste, and to move forward with a plan to build Ontario.

I hope that a bill like this is a bill that can be supported by the opposition. I understand that the opposition have a role to oppose; I get that. They have a role to oppose and question what the government is doing. But at the end of the day, if there's good legislation and the people of Ontario are supportive, come and join us—support us. I think the people of Ontario would be thrilled to see our opposition friends across the aisle here say, "I disagree with the government on some issues, but I'll tell you, this is some good legislation."

This is in the best interests of the people of Ontario. It's going to get things built quicker, reduce red tape, reduce unnecessary regulation, and help make Ontario—which is well on its way to taking back that title as the economic

engine of Canada, which we lost under the Liberal regime of 15 years. Ontario is back. We're back in business. We're creating that environment, getting things done, building housing, transportation. There's a lot to build.

I urge my colleagues from all sides to do what is best for the taxpayers, for the great citizens of Ontario: Support this legislation.

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I'd certainly like to thank the Minister of Infrastructure for putting forward this legislation.

I'd like to thank the Speaker for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions to the member for Oakville?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I thank the member from Oakville for his comments. I listened intently.

We had the opportunity to travel on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and we heard from many folks and organizations across the province who underscored the importance of housing as a social determinant of health.

Here on the opposition side, we believe in stretching a dollar as far as it goes. We believe in upstream investments, such as the province creating affordable housing, making sure that there's robust primary care infrastructure, making sure that we have nurse practitioners and family health teams.

My question is specifically about business. I would say that it is bad business—is it not?—to reward somebody who does not deserve it, somebody who has not earned it, somebody whose track record actually means that they are not doing the correct job. When we look at the example of Infrastructure Ontario, we have heard, in the Auditor General's report, about how ineffective they are. My question is, why is the government cherry-picking only the things that they like out of the Auditor General's report and not responding to all the things that need to be done?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to the member opposite. It was great travelling across the province with you. I got to know you a little better, and I appreciated getting to know you better.

I will disagree with you, though, on what you just mentioned with respect to Infrastructure Ontario. Having had the pleasure of working as a parliamentary assistant in the last Parliament for some time in that ministry, I can assure you that Infrastructure Ontario is a world-class organization—so much so that we had people from all over the world and Europe coming to visit Infrastructure Ontario to learn about all the great things we're doing. But as you point out, the Auditor General did point out some issues. There's always room for improvement. Every human being, every government, can always improve things, so there are certainly some things that the Auditor General pointed out, perhaps rightly, that they can improve on. But overall, I can assure you that we have one of the best organizations in the world right here in Toronto.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** With the uncertainty in the world right now and the cost pressures on family budgets, I'm

wondering if the member can tell me how this will better the lives of Ontarians.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to my colleague for a great question.

Part of being a government is that there are bills put before that Parliament and debated on a regular basis—and no one bill is going to solve all the problems of our province; there are so many components to it.

This bill, I think, has some very specific goals, targeting getting building done quicker and more efficiently. If we can do that, I think it will make industry more competitive. I think it will make housing more affordable. It will help municipalities be able to get the facilities they need built quicker, more efficiently. I really believe this is legislation that very well could be supported by the opposition. We'll have to see how they support this, but I think in the best interest of Ontarians they may well support it.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Parkdale–High Park.

**Ms. Bhutila Karpoche:** This bill will directly affect how we protect the environment. It will impact the environmental assessment process.

Frankly, Speaker, this government has a terrible record when it comes to the environment.

If the government is so confident and so willing to push forward the bill to reduce inefficiency and thinks that this bill will actually serve in the interest of Ontarians, then why did the government provide barely any notice, little to no communication, no briefing for the opposition, no public consultation?

What is the government's plan when it comes to ensuring that the public will have a say in this bill?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to the member opposite for that.

This is the people's House. We debate bills and we have the opportunity—we're on live TV right now, in front of the people of Ontario, so we're debating and we're discussing.

The government of Ontario has been very forthright and open with the legislation that we are now proposing to put through.

You did mention some of the issues related to the environment. Well, I will add that it's our government that increased the renewable content in ethanol gas from 10% to 15%. We've added acres to the greenbelt—in fact, it's the largest expansion in the history of the greenbelt since its inception. Over 2,000 acres are being added to the greenbelt—I don't hear that from the opposition questions too often. And we are now going to be a global hub for EV vehicles.

We are doing so much more. We have the opportunity to talk and debate today.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Don Valley West.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you to the member opposite for his discussion about this bill.

The government's news release about this bill talks about this being in response to the 2017 Auditor General's report.

I'm wondering if the government has had consultation with the Auditor General about this legislation in advance

and what their office's response was, i.e., does this actually meet their recommendations; does it fulfill all of the recommendations from that report? If not, what other steps will the government be taking to close those other gaps found by the Auditor General?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** I did mention that this bill has had a lot of consultation with a lot of different stakeholders—before putting it forward. Whether the Auditor General was in talks, I'm not sure, but I can tell you that we have put forward and we read the Auditor General's report in great detail and deciphered from that what we can put in this legislation. She has some great ideas about making the province more efficient, cutting red tape. As a government, we're willing to listen to anybody, so we're certainly willing to listen to her as well.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I thank the member from Oakville for his terrific remarks.

You mentioned 50 years and what an extraordinarily long time that is—some folks here not born yet. I can tell everyone that I was born—I was 13 years old 50 years ago. You can do the math. In fact, 50 years ago, I had just finished being a page the year before, so there you go. In fact, 50 years ago, the Toronto Maple Leafs had just won the cup six years earlier—wow.

**Mr. Nolan Quinn:** That is a long time ago.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Yes, it is a long time ago.

The environmental track record of this government has been mentioned. I've got to say, I'm very proud of what we are doing, whether it's the biggest transit investment in the history of the province, whether it's over 90% of our electricity production being clean, whether it's what we're doing in the steel industry, cleaning that up—and on and on it goes.

I want to ask the member, consistent with those measures and the upgrading of the environmental assessment process, how will this help achieve our goals for Ontario?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to my colleague for that very good question.

The legislation that we're putting through in reducing inefficiencies is going to have no negative impact on the environment whatsoever—period, full stop.

You did mention what are we doing in a positive way for the environment, that we don't often hear in the media and in the House: the largest investment in transit in Canadian history. People forget about that.

I talked about Infrastructure Ontario being a global leader in P3s and infrastructure development, which we should be very proud of. That's one thing I think Canadians and Ontarians need to do more—show the world what we're doing.

Ontario has over 90% emissions-free electricity, most of which—or a lot of that, a very high component—comes from nuclear. I'm not sure where the opposition NDP stands on that; I think there might be some division in the party, because I don't hear them talking too much about that.

We've got great programs in place. We're going to continue on this path to build Ontario and make it a great place to work, live and raise a family.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** There's time for a very quick question.

**Mr. Joel Harden:** My friend from Oakville said on several occasions that there's no impact to environmental assessments.

I just want to direct his attention and hear some comments about schedule 1, where this bill actually allows the environmental minister to waive the 30-day waiting period that's currently required following the end of the class EA assessment.

I'm wondering, am I not reading the legislation correctly, member? Is there not a significant change that would allow some—

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

Member for Oakville.

1420

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** To the member opposite: I think we're reading the same thing but maybe looking at it differently. But in the end, there is no change to the environmental assessment program—zero, period, full stop.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you very much. It can be done.

## ROYAL ASSENT

### SANCTION ROYALE

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

**The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim):** The following are the titles of the bills to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act respecting the adjustment of the boundary between the City of St. Thomas and the Municipality of Central Elgin / Loi concernant la modification des limites territoriales entre la cité de St. Thomas et la municipalité de Central Elgin.

An Act to revive Sapore Di Calabria Inc.

An Act to revive 1748317 Ontario Inc.

An Act to revive 933834 Ontario Limited.

An Act to revive Maizal Tortilleria Inc.

An Act to revive 2103890 Ontario Limited.

An Act to revive Woodstock Moose Lodge No. 1141 (Holdings) Limited.

## REDUCING INEFFICIENCIES ACT (INFRASTRUCTURE STATUTE LAW AMENDMENTS), 2023

### LOI DE 2023 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DES INEFFICACITÉS (MODIFIANT DES LOIS SUR LES INFRASTRUCTURES)

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

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Good afternoon, everyone. I will be sharing my time with my dynamite colleague MPP Bowman.

The government has big ambitions to cut red tape—and I do like the colour red, to the member of Oakville. What I am scared of is the green tape they might cut along the way.

I am open to hearing about Bill 69. I agree that we should modernize the environmental assessments process, because as we've heard umpteen times, it hasn't been updated in 50 years. What I am not sure of is if waiving the 30-day assessment period between when comments are given during the environmental assessment and when it can proceed is the way to do so.

Limiting the ability to extend comment periods may jeopardize meaningful consultation on projects. Short consultation periods may unfairly affect environmental groups that do not have enough full-time staff to compile research and responses. Believe me, these environmental groups have been scrambling to keep up with what's happening with this government lately. We have already seen the government suspend these 30-day periods to fast-track its projects, and it seems the bill, if passed, will turn that pattern into law. These periods allow for a thriving and healthy democracy, where Ontarians can have a say on various projects. We must allow for more input from the public, not less, and have ample time to digest the comments made and, if needed, action them to ensure our beautiful environment is protected.

Let's imagine a scenario where an Ontario environmental expert submits an important suggestion on the last day of the comment period. The government would have no obligation to understand or action the useful advice given.

This all comes after the government has already eliminated the role of our vital conservation authorities in building regulation with Bill 23.

Why doesn't the government want to utilize the skill set and knowledge of these experts? They continue to give themselves more power and authority, spreading their resources too thinly and creating a system where things fall through the cracks without the tape to keep it in place.

This bill does seem small and administrative; however, it could have potentially damaging effects. It's a slippery slope for environmental protections, and I must assess and evaluate Bill 69 knowing the government's track record on maintaining and strengthening said environmental protections.

Similar to Bill 23, Bill 69 is proposing the removal of the need for expertise in place to protect Ontarians from future disasters and financial burdens. Advice and consultation is essential in being proactive to combat emergency preparedness and climate adaptation.

We saw the role of conservation authorities dwindled down by Bill 23.

Conservation authorities were created following the disaster of Hurricane Hazel. This tragedy embarks a memory of Ontario's past that should not be forgotten. In 1954, over 1,000 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged. The flooding of these homes built on flood plains contributed to the death of 81 Ontarians. As a result, conservation authorities were designated duties to protect

and regulate land for the safety of communities. They were one piece of a larger puzzle to protect the ecosystem and environment we have and love in this province.

I worry about the ramifications of Bill 69 now, knowing that the government so readily removed the expertise of conservation authorities in the building process.

By introducing Bill 69, we are taking away protective measures in place for our constituents. I cannot sit back and watch, yet again, the advice of the experts with extensive knowledge on how to protect us be ignored by this government. How are we going to strive to protect our homes and our environment if we continue to take short-cuts? Think about your residents. Without consultation advice from environmental experts, our government will only contribute to the ongoing risks and harm towards the environment.

We know from the Insurance Bureau of Canada that insurance claims from severe weather have more than quadrupled over the past 15 years and that 10% of homes in Canada are now uninsurable relative to flood protection.

Building in certain areas without sufficient environmental consultation will cost the government and Ontarians in the long run.

Bill 69 may speed up the process of getting things built, but we may lose something critical along the way.

At this point, I would like more information about Bill 69—so much that earlier this week, my office contacted the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for a briefing. Unfortunately, the ministry told me they were unable to accommodate a briefing at this time. If they are unable to accommodate a briefing at this time, how will they be able to make comments on environmental assessments within the current additional 30 days? I worry about them managing their workload. Thankfully, the Ministry of Infrastructure has agreed to do a briefing.

At this point, in 2023, the risk is too high to eliminate any tools we need to protect the environment and the people of Ontario from emergencies. We may be cutting red tape, but at what cost? Building sustainably with proper care and consideration of our environment protections is the right and fiscally responsible thing to do.

I'm handing over my time to my colleague.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Don Valley West to continue.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I appreciate this government's goal to reduce red tape. If a regulation is unnecessarily burdensome, then we should consider amending or removing it. For example, I am supportive of changes that allow businesses to submit information to the government digitally when possible.

But I have to say that I and others on this side of the House still have a lot to learn about the goals and outcomes the government hopes to achieve through this bill.

I was very confused upon reading schedule 2, because while this bill purports to reduce red tape, it may in fact actually add to it. As it stands, Ontario's crown corporations are able to manage their own real estate. Often, they rent space in an office building, as many small and medium-sized organizations do. But if this new legislation

is enacted, these crown corporations will have their real estate authority stripped from them and placed in the hands of the mega Ministry of Infrastructure.

For example, today the EQAO can decide for itself, within its approved budget, where its couple of dozen employees will work. If they needed help with that decision, I expect the Ministry of Infrastructure staff would be happy to offer advice; instead, now the ministry will decide. So if I understand correctly, the EQAO will have to go to the ministry to say that their lease is up for renewal, and a decision will have to be made by the minister whether the lease is renewed or they will need to relocate. It seems to me this could in fact add layers to this decision. For example, an employee in the ministry will consider the issue and go to their superior, who will go to their superior, who will go to the deputy minister. Because of possible bottlenecks, this decision could actually take longer than it does today, and if there is a bottleneck with approvals and decision-making, I can envision a scenario where the deputy minister will have to hire a contractor who may even end up making the same decision the EQAO would have in the first place. Instead, this decision will have taken longer, will have cost the taxpayers more money, and will have been done with less transparency.

**1430**

This government does have a clear track record of making decisions without consultation and without being transparent with the voters of Ontario about their rationale—for example, the strong-mayors legislation; reducing conservation authorities' ability to protect the environment; invoking the “notwithstanding” clause; and, of course, opening up the greenbelt after saying that they wouldn't.

When I say here today that my constituents have become skeptical about decisions like this one that come from this government, I hope the government will listen and be more transparent about the rationale for this bill. The only explanation provided is that it stems from an Auditor General report. The member from Oakville could not say if the Auditor General had been consulted in advance of this legislation being developed.

The Auditor General did indeed recommend that Infrastructure Ontario work with ministries and agencies on how to more efficiently use their real estate. She did not recommend this heavy-handed approach of seizing real estate powers.

I am keen to hear more about how this bill will reduce red tape, what the financial business case for this bill is, and what actual dollars and efficiencies the government hopes to achieve.

I will also be looking to learn more about whether or not they did consult the crown corporations affected and the relevant public sector unions that may also be affected, to see if this really is the best course of action. Perhaps this is an opportunity to move these organizations to locations that are lower-cost, but it may not help them fulfill their mandate.

Speaker, I also have requested a briefing from the Minister of Infrastructure. I'm happy to say that I've been

told I will be meeting with him next week, and I look forward to learning more about this legislation.

I don't really see this legislation as being about red tape. It seems to have a different rationale, and I do hope we get transparency on that.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Now we'll have questions to the members who just made their presentation together.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thanks to the members opposite for their comments on the bill.

I want to follow up with the member for Don Valley West about real estate. I value her commercial experience and perspective on this.

Your perspective was, let's let the agencies themselves manage the real estate under their mandate. You could equally argue, and I have sympathy for the argument that says, that if you're in government—that means there are 14 or more different agencies, all with their own portfolios, all with their own objectives. That can result in conflicting approaches, inefficiencies, on and on and on. Gathering them together under one ministry, which undoubtedly will consult these agencies, seems to me a much more efficient and effective way to manage a portfolio.

I'm curious about the member's thoughts on the real estate elements of this bill that you mentioned.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I appreciate his kind words.

I certainly do believe there are times to centralize. Again, at the moment, I'm not particularly saying no to this. I think other members in the official opposition have asked, why these 14? Under the rationale you've just provided, you might say that all 34 agencies should be done this way. I would just like to understand the actual specific goals. For example, will this save a million dollars? Will this save \$10 million? Where do those savings come from?

I'm open to learning more. I do hope to learn more from the minister next week, and I look forward to further debate on this.

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

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** To the member from Beaches—East York: This legislation creates loopholes to expedite environmental assessments. That might be okay, but it comes down to trust—trust that the government will use it properly.

Can the member expand on why there might be a lack of trust relating to the government on the environment?

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Thank you very much to the member from St. Catharines—a beautiful riding—for that very vital and important question about trust with this government on the environmental front.

On my first day here, basically, we had the beautiful throne speech, and climate change was not mentioned once. As my Irish nana would say, start as you mean to go on. That's how we started here with trust on the environmental front. And then we have gone to—lucky me, because most of these wild bills have come to my committee—Bill 23, Bill 6, Bill 39. We have the

destruction of the conservation authorities. We have the destruction of the Toronto Green Standard, which the Premier actually voted in support of when he was working with me at Toronto city hall back in the day. And with the destruction of the Toronto Green Standard, we also lose green standards from other municipalities. Many members here would have great green standards in their own municipalities. We've lost that across Ontario. So, essentially, we're not starting as we mean to go on.

There's a huge lack of trust with this government on the environmental front amongst many Ontarians and many in this chamber. It's unfortunate.

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

**Mr. Joel Harden:** Again, returning to my friends from the Liberal caucus: I think it is worth thinking about the context of the last four years. We've been asking this question about environmental assessments and the importance of them. We're seeing that schedule 1 of this particular bill gets rid of that 30-day waiting period, and I'm wondering if you have any examples from your own communities about when having that 30-day waiting period could actually add some value—in seeing that moving ahead with something may not be in the public's best interest.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Thank you to the passionate member from Ottawa Centre, another beautiful area of our province.

There are many examples right across Ontario of how and why we need that 30-day period and we need to listen to experts.

I think this has been the problem with some of these bills and what the government hopes to accomplish.

I would say this with all due respect: We are not the sharpest knives in the drawer; we are not the experts in every single area of expertise. That is why we rely on experts such as the conservation authorities. They have institutional knowledge. They have a wealth of history, a long history in protecting Ontario from flooding and other natural disasters. So it is up to the government to listen to experts and then formulate proper legislation that respects Ontarians, that respects the environment.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions?

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, the members opposite keep talking about the environmental assessment. This bill clearly states, and the Minister of Infrastructure has covered in her speech, that the environmental process is not being compromised, and the proposed legislative amendments are minor and will not have any impact on the existing class environmental assessments or environmental protection.

What this bill will instead do, as I said, is, it will reduce red tape, it will optimize office space and improve economic growth, and it will have tangible savings for the government in the mid-term and the long term and will save taxpayers money.

Why are the members opposite against building infrastructure that the people of Ontario need and deserve?

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Well, I think, as I stated earlier, at the moment we're not actually speaking out

against the bill. We are, of course, in favour of efficiencies where they make sense.

I will point out to the member that in the news release—again, from the government—it mentions that they will manage the real estate portfolio more effectively through centralizing authority and decision-making. I might be mistaken, but I was not able to see those words in the Auditor General's report.

Again, I think if we had some transparency around the number of dollars that this bill is planning to save for the taxpayers of Ontario, I think that would be great transparency, and I think that would then actually tell us exactly where those savings are going to be achieved, and that would be very helpful.

**1440**

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

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the members for their comments about Bill 69.

I want to return to the Auditor General's report, where it was pointed out how Infrastructure Ontario management was deemed ineffective—that there were no standards of performance, no timelines, and even that there were invoices that were non-specific to the location as well as the services that were provided.

Is it good business to continually reward organizations that do not have performance standards, that do not have timelines, and that are unspecific on invoices?

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you to the member from London for the question.

I would say no, that is not good business practice, of course. I think that was a nice friendly question over here, so thank you.

Again, that's the crux of some of our questions about this bill.

Certainly, the Auditor General had some strong recommendations for Infrastructure Ontario and how it does its procurement, how it manages its suppliers—and that their tenants are not getting the services they need on a timely basis or perhaps in a cost-efficient way.

I'm still trying to understand why this bill is specifically only focusing on one particular recommendation, which was number 10, where the Ministry of Infrastructure says they will undertake a review of the realty operating model and associated financial model in order to study and implement improvements to the management of government properties, and that they will work closely with Infrastructure Ontario and all ministry tenants to examine different options for effective service delivery and the management of government properties—so again, I would say that that is really what the focus should be, as opposed to a recommendation to immediately seize control over these properties.

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

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** It is a pleasure to rise today on behalf of the people I represent in London West to participate in the debate on Bill 69, the Reducing Inefficiencies Act.

Speaker, this is a bill that the government claims, in its news release, will reduce red tape, save taxpayer money,

and boost economic growth. Yet in the six hours of debate we have had so far in this place, we have heard absolutely no evidence from the government that the measures set out in this bill will achieve those goals.

This is a relatively straightforward bill. There are two very distinct schedules. Schedule 1 deals with the 30-day waiting period for class environmental assessments. Schedule 2 deals with the government's real estate holdings—certain real estate holdings—and the holdings that are held by prescribed entities.

We have some concerns about these measures, as innocuous as they appear, because we have seen this government in action.

It's interesting to read the press release that accompanied the government's introduction of this legislation, in which they state that schedule 1 is necessary because the environmental assessment process is too slow, too costly and too burdensome. They also state that schedule 2, the schedule that deals with real estate holdings, will address the 2017 Auditor General's report. I'm going to go through those two statements in some detail and explain why we have reservations, why we have concerns, and why we will not be supporting this bill.

Schedule 1, as I said, changes the 30-day waiting period for environmental assessments because the government feels that environmental assessments are burdensome red tape. That is not a view we share, and I can tell you that is not a view that is shared by the vast majority of people in this province, as we live in the midst of a climate emergency that is just getting worse.

We heard, interestingly, from a member across the way earlier this afternoon that this bill actually changes nothing with the environmental assessment process, which is curious to understand—if that was the case, why the government would bring in legislation that apparently the government believes will do nothing. But that's another issue.

When we read the legislation, we see that schedule 1 of the bill allows the minister to waive the 30-day waiting period that is currently required under the Environmental Assessment Act.

Let's review why the Environmental Assessment Act includes a 30-day waiting period. That period provides the minister with time to consider public comments that may be received after a class environmental assessment process, before making a decision whether to issue an approval to proceed. Waiving this waiting period would mean that the minister doesn't really see any point in taking those 30 days to consider those comments. We know that the Environmental Assessment Act was introduced in this province decades ago in order to provide that important opportunity for sober second thought to assess the impact of environmental projects on the environment, sensitive wetlands, flood plains and other public places. This schedule just waives that 30-day waiting period and allows the minister to move much more quickly than they would have in the past.

I do want to make the proviso that we have seen this government repeatedly ignore public input, so I have to say that in many ways what this schedule does is to allow

the government to just ignore public input faster. They can ignore it from the day that it is provided, rather than having to wait 30 days before they decide to ignore what the public has to say.

We also have seen this government twice be found by the courts to have violated the Environmental Bill of Rights in terms of the notice period that they give the public on matters affecting the environment. They have also violated the Environmental Bill of Rights in terms of the public's right to have their comments considered by the government prior to the government making a decision or introducing legislation. We saw this numerous times under the Ford government, with legislation that has been brought in either before the 30-day waiting period has ended or without any regard to the responsibility to put legislation out for public input before it is passed.

I want to quote Environmental Defence's Phil Pothén, who is the Ontario program manager—a great champion of the environment and an honest critic of this government. He has raised the concern about the elimination of this 30-day waiting period, that it's worrisome, because, he says it's a time when the minister is supposed to be considering—by legislation—and the public is supposed to be debating, whether to refer a project for a more detailed assessment. I understand that in response to some of these concerns that were raised by Environmental Defence, the environment minister's office clarified that large transit projects in this province—not to worry—would likely still be subject to a full environmental assessment. The government also reassured Ontarians that the waiting period would only be waived in certain circumstances. I have to say that that is cold comfort to the many Ontarians who have seen the track record of this government in taking into account the impact of their legislation and policy decisions on the environment, and in particular the environmental assessment process.

#### 1450

This is a government that, in 2020, completely overhauled the environmental assessment process, completely eroded the protections that had been built into the environmental assessment process with Bill 197. That bill said that public sector projects which previously had been automatically subject to an environmental assessment would now only need one if the government decided that it was necessary. That bill also eliminated the mechanism that citizens had available to them to call on the Minister of the Environment to conduct a full assessment on projects that would otherwise be exempt. Under that legislation, which this government passed, prior to the 30-day period that was required by the Environmental Bill of Rights, there is no longer that ability to conduct an environmental assessment on projects that are exempt.

Frankly, as I mentioned, we are in a period in our history when we are facing a dire climate emergency.

I want to give a shout out to the people of London, to the city councillors in my community of London. London was one of the first communities in Ontario to actually issue a formal declaration of climate emergency. That was back in April 2019. Londoners take the responsibility to

act on the climate emergency very seriously. There has been an extensive period of public consultation since that declaration of climate emergency was issued in London. And just last year, a climate emergency action plan was released that outlines more than 200 specific strategies and actions to deal with the impact of climate emergency, to deal with those extreme weather events that are causing catastrophic flooding, freezing rain, extreme temperatures and heat waves that are creating so much pressure on our health and food security in this province.

Also, we heard this morning about Windsor—you can't even get insurance anymore in Windsor. The cost has just skyrocketed because of the impact of the severe flooding that community has experienced, which has caused billions of dollars in property damage.

We have an obligation to take our responsibility to deal with the climate emergency seriously. And what does this bill do? It further waters down Ontario's environmental assessment process. That is one of the reasons why the official opposition is so concerned about this bill.

The other schedule of Bill 69, as I said, deals with certain real estate holdings of a number of arm's-length corporations of the Ontario government.

It's interesting that the government claims that this bill was drafted in order to address some of the specific recommendations that the Auditor General had made in a 2017 report. I have that report in front of me, and I was curious to know what those recommendations were that the Auditor General had made dealing with Infrastructure Ontario real estate services. What the Auditor General pointed out in that report were numerous problems, a litany of problems, related to Infrastructure Ontario's oversight of its real estate holdings, and most of those problems that are outlined in the Auditor General's report concern the policies and processes set in place by Infrastructure Ontario. Yet this government's response, apparently, to that report is to bring in 14 of the 34 agencies that currently manage government-owned property under the auspices of Infrastructure Ontario, the very agency that was highlighted by the Auditor General as having completely inadequate controls on its management of real estate services.

What were some of the things that the Auditor General highlighted in her report? She highlighted that the design of the RFP approach by Infrastructure Ontario—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I apologize to the member. I have to interrupt her to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader or his designate directs the debate to continue.

I recognize the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

**Hon. Charmaine A. Williams:** Please continue the debate.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** We'll return to the member for London West.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you very much, Speaker.

I was highlighting some of the findings of the Auditor General's 2017 report, which nowhere included a recommendation that 14 of the 34 agencies that manage government-owned property should be consolidated under the auspices of one entity, presumably Infrastructure Ontario. But the auditor pointed out a number of concerns dealing with the design of the RFP approach, 7,500 capital projects across the province, the way that the bids were issued, generated—three bids received by the government, two proponents selected.

The Auditor General recommended better oversight of procurement methods for capital projects. She recommended better incentive structures for project managers to manage costs. She recommended incentives to complete projects on time. She recommended better information on operating and maintenance services for client ministries. She identified a problem that office space per person exceeds the ministry standards.

There were a number of issues that were identified by the Auditor General, mainly dealing with the outsourcing of property management to private contractors and criticizing the uncompetitive procurement process that IO engages in and the poor oversight of these private contracts.

We have heard nothing from this government to explain why they believed that the appropriate response to the Auditor General's report is to bring 14 of the 34 agencies that manage government-owned property under the umbrella of a single entity. And it's particularly worrisome that that single entity is Infrastructure Ontario, which has been noted by the Auditor General as being not able to manage its own processes and real estate holdings.

This is a case of the government bringing forward legislation without providing a sufficient rationale for why they are taking these actions, and without providing any evidence that these measures will actually achieve what the government says they are hoping to achieve with this bill.

**1500**

As I said, it is really difficult to put our faith in the government and give them carte blanche to just take these legislative changes that they are putting out here—and act in the best interests of the people of this province—because that's not what we have seen from this government. We have certainly not seen this government acting in the best interests of the people of this province on environmental protection. We have certainly not seen it with Bill 23 and the government's decision to carve up the greenbelt to build more homes, when experts are telling us that the government could exceed the affordable housing task force target of 1.5 million homes in a decade—they could actually build two million homes in a decade—without going anywhere near the greenbelt. That's what experts are telling this government, and yet they're plowing ahead with this decision to carve up the greenbelt in the face of tremendous public opposition.

So I think that you can understand and appreciate, Speaker, why we have reservations about the measures set



out in this bill, why we would not support any further erosion of the environmental protection process, why we are skeptical of consolidating a number of real estate holdings under the auspices of an agency—Infrastructure Ontario—that has a very poor track record in managing its own properties, and why we have stated that we will not be supporting this bill.

People deserve a government that's going to protect the environment, that's going to take concrete and effective action on climate change, and that's going to be a responsible steward of public dollars and manage public agencies appropriately.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Question?

**Mr. Ric Bresee:** I appreciated the comments from the member from London West, especially early on in her presentation.

She expressed concern about the supposed speculative nature of the efficiencies that are proposed by this legislation—and yet, when referring to the attached schedule, says the minister may waive the 30-day holding period if it's not needed. The opposition speculates that this may prevent the minister from extending the comment period if that's deemed beneficial, and ignores the statement from the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks earlier today that this would allow the opportunity to expedite a project, to get it done in that construction season and not create that artificial delay to the next construction season.

Will the member acknowledge that there are benefits to getting positive projects done faster, more efficiently and with more respect for our taxpayers' money?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you to the member for Hastings–Lennox and Addington for his question.

I did hear the minister make that statement, but I tend to look at someone's track record before I believe what's coming out of their mouth. And what I have seen from this government is a track record that gives me no confidence whatsoever that this government will act responsibly and take environmental impact into consideration when it is deciding to fast-track municipal projects. I mentioned the city of London's climate emergency action plan—more than 200 specific strategies. Not one of those strategies included watering down the environmental assessment process for municipal projects.

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

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** Thank you to the member for London West. It's always great to hear what she has to say on bills; it's very educating.

Time and time again, the government has shown that they are willing to water down environmental assessment policies—whether it is selling off the greenbelt to make it easier to build on, or to build on wetlands.

How worried are you that the policy change to eliminate environmental assessment wait periods, so the minister can evaluate public comments, will be misused?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I think the member for St. Catharines is as concerned as I am about the potential misuse of the government's new ability, set out in this legislation, to waive that 30-day waiting period.

We have seen a government that has basically shown complete contempt for environmental protections in this province that have been established for 30 years.

Under an NDP government, in 1993, we brought in the Environmental Bill of Rights to require the government to consult with the public on public sector undertakings.

What we have seen from this government is the most massive overhaul of the environmental assessment process that has ever occurred in Ontario. This is just one step further to water down the environmental protections that Ontarians rely on, that Ontarians need, that our climate needs if we are to make it through this climate emergency.

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

**Hon. Graydon Smith:** I have been amazed, since I got here, that every time we have talked about a bill to make things more efficient and to work better, the opposition can pooh-pooh it every single time. I come from a municipal environment where we always wanted to take that opportunity to make things more efficient because it was better for people, it was better for projects. Yet that just seems impossible for the opposition to appreciate. Dare I say, if the gift horse clip-clopped by, they would look it squarely in the mouth and the gift horse would move on.

If getting more efficient isn't a goal, I would simply ask you, why not move the waiting period to 60, 90, 120 days? Why don't we just slow this right down so much that we don't get anything done?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I appreciate the comments from the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

I fail to understand how a bill that consolidates 14 public agencies that manage properties that are owned by the Ontario government under the auspices of an agency—Infrastructure Ontario—that has been so roundly criticized by the Auditor General for its inability to efficiently and effectively manage government real estate in any way benefits people of this province.

We have not seen any evidence from the government side that schedule 2 of this bill will do anything to actually save taxpayers' money.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

**Ms. Chandra Pasma:** Thank you to the member for London West for your excellent comments, as always.

In Ottawa, we have really seen the cost of natural disasters to taxpayers and to residents. We've heard a lot from the government this afternoon about saving taxpayers' money. Let me tell you, when you have a once-in-a-century flood, that is incredibly costly to taxpayers. It is incredibly costly to homeowners as well.

One of the things that we've seen, as well, is that environmental assessments are incredibly important for knowing where and when it is safe to build and when it is safe to have a building project. When you don't take the time to do that right, it is going to have more costs for taxpayers and more costs for homeowners when that natural disaster occurs.

Can the member speak a little bit more about why it is so important to have these environmental assessments done, from the perspective of the residents in Ontario?

1510

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you to my colleague the member for Ottawa West–Nepean for highlighting the financial costs of failing to act on climate change.

We recently received a report from the Financial Accountability Officer that failing to act on climate change, even in an optimistic scenario, would mean about \$171 billion in costs over the rest of the century to deal with road, rail and bridge repairs alone. The Financial Accountability Officer also highlighted that that is the optimistic scenario, but costs could climb to as high as \$322 billion because of damage to transportation infrastructure and other costs if there is an increase in heat, flooding and extreme weather events.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Next, the member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you to the member opposite for her passionate presentation and input.

Since 2018, our government's stated goal was to reduce red tape, and we have worked so hard on making red tape our top target, to make it easier for various kinds of industries and businesses to be able to do business, to establish business, and to help improve the way of life of Ontarians. The Minister of Economic Development, on many occasions, stated the benefits of our policies so far: \$7 billion in annual savings for businesses.

My question is, what's wrong with reducing red tape? Why is the opposition adamant on creating more red tape? We have seen the catastrophic result of having red tape, where hundreds of thousands of people were unemployed. Companies left Ontario because of this policy, and we are trying—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** We've got to give the member for London West a chance to reply.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you very much, Speaker.

The problem is that environmental protections are not red tape. That is an issue that this government continues to fail to understand. You can't erode clean water protections, you can't gut conservation authorities' responsibility for flood control, and you can't water down the environmental assessment process in the name of eliminating red tape. That is not red tape. That is a threat to the health and well-being of the people of this province.

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

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** As I rise in the House today to speak on this important bill, Bill 69, I want to be crystal clear: This is the bill which is going to make sure Ontario is reducing red tape. It's going to save taxpayers money. It's going to boost economic growth in Ontario, and it's going to make Ontario another great example as a place to live, raise a family and thrive. Mr. Speaker, that is why I am supporting this bill.

Speaking as somebody who came to this great country as an immigrant—and I know that as an immigrant, when you arrive, you have limited resources. You have limited resources, but you have immense faith in the Canadian

dream. You must exercise fiscal prudence. Every dollar matters.

Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what this bill is doing. It is about our government's unwavering commitment to restore Ontario's promise to its people to get it done and do it in a fiscally prudent way.

If you really look at it, since 2018, this government's action under the leadership of Premier Ford has been guided by this commitment. Mr. Speaker, this bill is another step in that very direction.

Ontario has the largest real estate portfolios in Canada. If we talk about Ontario, we're responsible for 42% of the economy, 40% of the people and 30% of the land mass—right here. The value, if you really look at the Financial Accountability Officer's estimate in 2020, the replacement value of the province's infrastructure was \$265 billion. By the way, when we talk about that, this \$265 billion, the government of Ontario is not the owner of that \$265 billion; it is the Ontarians. The people of Ontario are the owners of that \$265 billion. The government of Ontario is the custodian of the taxpayers' dollars that build, improve and service these assets. That is why it is an important duty for the government to make sure that we can optimize the spending, reduce the red tape and reduce the cost, to make sure that the people of Ontario, who have sent us to take care of their assets as the custodians, the people who put trust in us—we give back that trust. We give back that example by making sure that every penny is saved. That is what this Bill 69 is doing, Mr. Speaker.

The provincial oversight of our sprawling realty portfolio, as Minister Surma pointed out, is distributed among five ministries and 54 entities. So as of legal right, these ministers are free to follow their own protocols and manage their own real estate affairs, resulting in sometime inefficiencies, higher costs—something we've seen as a legacy problem.

And it's not we're saying this; let's look at what, in 2017, the Auditor General's annual report pointed to. The Auditor General said the Ministry of Infrastructure's real estate portfolio could be managed more efficiently to centralize authority and decision-making. The report found that almost \$19 million was spent as rent paid to third parties, property taxes and operating and maintenance costs for 812 vacant buildings across the province in 2016-17. It further added that 600 of the 812 had been vacant for an average of almost eight years. It found that the amount of lifecycle maintenance that has been deferred has spiked—\$420 million in March 2012, to \$860 million in March 2017.

So Mr. Speaker, if you really look at it, the Auditor General acknowledged that it is unsustainable to manage the real estate portfolio in the model which has been here since 1998. According to the report, the Ministry of Infrastructure even admitted variations and inconsistencies in managing their real estate. That is what this bill is trying to correct.

To begin with, the proposed bill will modify the real estate authority of 14 other entities under eight ministries and give the Minister of Infrastructure control of realty

property under these proposed entities. What is the benefit? The benefit is going to be that this will streamline management, end duplication, align decision-making with government objectives. Simply put, it will reduce red tape, optimize the office space, enhance fiscal management and, above all, save taxpayers money.

Madam Speaker, when you see that you have a problem, you have a choice: You sit and watch, or you fix it. Bill 69 is going to fix it. We're doing it through a consultative process with the eight concerned ministries. We're doing it through a thoughtful process. The partner ministries have been engaged since 2020, and even after the bill goes through, they will be part of the consultative process and free to express their real estate needs.

**1520**

We're not the only one. We have seen it in the past. We have seen it in Toronto, for an example. The city of Toronto adopted a centralized real estate model in 2017. In 2023, a review by the city claimed that its whole-of-government approach to real estate portfolio management had unlocked land value of \$1.5 billion and saved \$26 million per year in operating costs and \$4.5 million per year in capital costs. Madam Speaker, in a few years, I hope and I wish that I'm going to be standing again, getting an opportunity to talk about another bill where we will be modernizing the processes and I will be able to showcase what we've achieved through Bill 69.

By the way, we're not the only one. When we know there is uncertainty across the globe, the other countries—for example, United States, Ireland, South Korea, New Zealand—are looking at modernizing public real estate portfolio management, something that as a custodian we need to continue to work on, to strive to make sure that we give value back to our residents.

The Minister of Infrastructure pointed out a Deloitte report which was written in 2019 that found that centralized real estate decision-making would improve management, and there is an abundance of evidence and research that bears out that we are moving in the right direction.

And it's not just, when we talk about this Bill 69, that we're going to reduce red tape. We're going to save taxpayers money. We're actually going to boost economic growth as well.

I'll give you a small example. Let's say, for example, there is an entity who is in the greater Toronto area, maybe downtown Toronto. When we know that the cost of renting is high in downtown Toronto and there's a lack of housing, there is a lack of labour force, when we move this entity into our smaller communities, communities like London or maybe Guelph, Cambridge, Waterloo, what happens with that? Number one, you're reducing the cost of renting. You're saving the money and you're spreading the opportunity. And it's not just spreading the opportunity. For an example, if 10 employees move into those smaller communities, their families are joining them. When their families are joining them, they're going to solve the problem with the labour force there. There's economic benefit in these smaller communities. All these

families are going to go eat. They're going to watch movies. They're going to go out to take their kids to the hockey game. They're going to teach all those activities like karate, swimming. That's going to increase the economic benefit to these smaller communities.

Now, of course, when we talk about modernization, when we talk about doing something, change management, somebody is going to come up and say, "Hey, what's going to happen with Toronto? What if we move too many people from here? Will that create a vacancy?" Mind it, Madam Speaker: We're going to embrace 300,000 new Canadians in the future. We need to make space for them as well. It will help to create that space, because typically, what happens when a new immigrant comes is they want to go to a place which is comfortable, an urban area, rather than going to the smaller communities. By having this movement, we're actually not just supporting smaller communities; we are making sure the whole province is growing together. I think this is why I truly believe this is something which we need to do and make sure that not just the urban centres but the whole province grows together.

Now, I know, Madam Speaker, it's not only one aspect of this bill. There's a second aspect of the bill, which I'll be talking about: reducing administrative burden on standard infrastructure projects. The current environmental assessment process requires a 30-day review period between when a class environmental assessment is completed—and I mean completed, after it is complete—and when the property may begin project activity. So just like this—we're not changing. We're not saying that you don't have to do the assessment. You still have to do the assessment. There's no change to the environmental assessment.

What we're changing is—after the assessment, you have to wait for 30 days. Rather than waiting for 30 days, you can start the project activities earlier. This 30-day period provides the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks with an opportunity to require the proponent to undertake a high level of environmental assessment. For those 30 days, once a project—and again, I'm going to use the word—once has a project has completed a class EA requirement and there are no outstanding issues, the project, as we stand now, cannot proceed further.

You have an obligation to do an assessment; you did the assessment. You found out there is nothing which is pending, and then you're excited. Okay, now it's time to build. No, no, no—wait a second. You can't build. You have to wait for 30 days. Sleep, go out, take vacation. No, no—wait a second. It's not a vacation; it's a vacation for not building.

And Madam Speaker, I talk about reducing red tape—saving taxpayer money. But I did talk about boosting economic growth. We're talking about what we've done here, this government—we've invested into Ontario. We've seen the results. We are building \$160 billion of capital projects over the next 10 years. We're making sure that we are investing in health care. And to do all these

things, we need to take action and we need to do things faster.

For those 30 days, once a project has completed a class EA requirement and there is no outstanding issue, the project cannot proceed. For 30 days, permits cannot be issued. To me, Madam Speaker, this is an unnecessary delay, and many times it's an unacceptable delay.

Just imagine, for an example, a municipality is looking for a much-needed infrastructure project like building a bridge or widening a road critical to the lifeblood of their town. Imagine that municipality being ready and able to start the project. School is about to open up. It's the end of August, September. They're wanting to get it under way and make progress while the weather is still warm. And then imagine: You've done your class EA—there is no requirement—and still you're told, "I apologize. You've done your part, but you cannot start. You have to wait for 30 days." Madam Speaker, the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks has absolutely no reason or plan to require you to undertake a high level of environmental assessment. And you have to wait for no good reason.

So I think it's a great example. Rather than waiting, let's reduce the red tape. Let's make sure we follow the class EA assessment, and we make sure we don't change that. We make sure that there's nothing pending. But we make sure of this also: If nothing is pending, let's start constructing and give back to the communities the support for infrastructure they need. And that is exactly why this government is committed to cutting unnecessary and burdensome red tape through Bill 69. That very reason—Madam Speaker, I'm asking the members of this side and the members on that side, if you believe that Ontarians deserve custodians who take care of Ontarians, if you believe that we have to make sure that we're fiscally prudent, and if you believe that we want to make sure we do not become a hurdle in the economic growth of Ontario, I am asking everyone to support this bill: a bill that would eliminate unnecessary red tape, a bill that would be welcomed by municipalities and other proponents looking to provide much-needed infrastructure to our province, a bill that would build Ontario, a bill that will continue our path to prosperity. I'm going to support this bill, and I hope and wish, if you believe in Ontario, if you believe in the economic prosperity of Ontario, you are going to support this bill as well.

1530

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga–Malton for his presentation. I think it's important that we recognize that trust is not something that is freely given; it is something that is earned, and it's earned based on reputation and based on past behaviour. Frequently with this government, we see many pieces of legislation that are very concerning. We see a government that is very interested in backroom deals and escape hatches. There are many workarounds that this government has created with legislation, such as Bill 124 to trample on the rights of health care workers, as well as Bill

28, the bill that was until it wasn't, with the "notwithstanding" clause. Also, MZO's are yet another example of this.

Does the member think that environmental protections are worth protecting? Why are you creating an escape hatch to override environmental protections?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I would like to say thank you to the member opposite for the question. The environmental assessment process: As I stated earlier, the first step with any proponent, any municipality that is looking to start the project, is, we want to make sure that they follow the class EA process and there is nothing pending. What this bill is going to do is not going to compromise anything on the environment assessment. But what it would do is the proposed legislative amendment will make sure that it will modernize the process. Rather than waiting for 30 days to deliver those important infrastructure projects, you're able to deliver it in time to the people of Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Rob Flack:** Change for the sake of change doesn't make sense. I think we can all agree to that. But change for common sense, change for good financial sense and change for good governance do make sense; at least, it always has in my life. To me, when you read this bill and understand what we're trying to accomplish, centralizing the oversight of 14 different agencies I believe will help optimize space and efficiency and reduce red tape for the province of Ontario and the people of Ontario.

We've got one of the largest and most diverse real estate portfolios in the nation, and we need to manage it more effectively. Giving the Minister of Infrastructure the ability to oversee and manage real estate property previously under control of different entities is not efficient. But with that comes accountability. I think we all agree that we need accountability in this House and in this government—any government. That is in keeping, in fact, with the 2017 Auditor General's report and other third-party reports that have identified opportunities for real estate improvement.

To the honourable member: Measure twice, cut once; do you agree?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you to the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London. I can't disagree. Whatever you said, you said it so well. Absolutely.

In 2017, you talked about Auditor General's report and other third-party reports that have identified opportunities for the province to deliver the real estate portfolio more efficiently through initiatives that centralize authority and decision-making. Again, this government is not the owner of the assets; we're the custodian of the assets. We want to make sure we give the best value back to the people who gave their trust on June 2 and make sure that we keep that trust and we keep that confidence they gave to us. We just want to say thank you—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Thank you. Questions?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Before I pose my question, I want to take the opportunity to welcome guests that we have in the

Speaker's gallery. We have the Forest Hill community group joining us here this afternoon. Thank you very much.

My question is about an enshrined right of the people of Ontario. We have the Environmental Bill of Rights, which is a right that we have access to. Your government is taking that right away. You've also been shown in court to have violated people's rights a number of times. The Minister of the Environment has said that these rights are nonsensical and that they are burdensome.

Part of the rights that people have under the Environmental Bill of Rights is a part II bump-up request. In Hamilton, we used that to make sure that a gasification plant in a neighbourhood in Hamilton was not approved.

What do the changes you are proposing do for part II bump-up order request?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Ontario is developing sensible, practical changes to ensure continued environmental oversight while reducing delays on a project-specific basis, and that is exactly what Bill 69 is doing.

The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks would continue to have the ability to consider section 17 order requests, which may be made on the grounds that the order may prevent, mitigate or remedy adverse impacts on constitutionally protected lands and rights, Madam Speaker.

Ontario will continue to ensure strong environmental protection and standards while protecting good governance and reducing inefficiencies, and that is exactly what Bill 69 is doing.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Question.

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** Thank you to my colleague from Mississauga–Malton, a wonderful riding. Thank you for your hard work.

Madam Speaker, Ontario expects our government to practise good governance. We were re-elected with the promise to work for the people—the people of Ontario. This legislation cuts red tape by streamlining the oversight of 14 real estate agencies and reducing the waiting period in an EA process. It will save taxpayers' dollars and reduce inefficiencies, which the people expect us to deliver.

I will ask the member, how is this legislation going to better the life of Ontarians?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you to the member from Markham–Thornhill for your advocacy and for your work.

What our government is doing is our government is building Ontario. We are formalizing the ability, meaning standard projects that occur across the province, like the creation of new municipal roads or stormwater infrastructure, could be ready almost a month earlier than previously. Sometimes if you're starting somewhere in August or September, it's not just one month; you're just doing one or two seasons ahead.

That is why the legislation we introduce today is another great step in fulfilling our promise to Ontarians of good governance, fiscal responsibility, a plan to build. If you're looking to come and live, Ontario is the best place.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I'd also like to welcome the fine folks from Forest Hill in St. Paul's. Welcome to your House.

My question to the government: I'm wondering how the government feels that this piece of legislation is going to build trust in community with regard to the environment when we have seen this government slash the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. We have seen this government sell off or attempt to sell off parts of the greenbelt. We have seen this government not support nature in a way that actually allows our upcoming generation of leaders to be safe without climate crisis anxiety. What is there in this piece of legislation that's going to ensure that Ontarians can actually trust what this government has to say about the environment?

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you to the member opposite for that important question. Through this bill, when any of the municipalities of the province have completed their class EA and there's no pending requirement, they don't have to wait for 30 days. What does this mean? This means the government is going to build the trust that Ontarians have put in this government by building those roads faster, not just by at least one month but, many times, by one or two seasons. That is what we're doing. We are making sure that we're reducing red tape. We are making sure that we're building a better Ontario.

1540

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Further debate?

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** I'm pleased to be here today to speak to this bill, Bill 69, the Reducing Inefficiencies Act. I love the titles that you folks come up with. It's always interesting to read what efficiencies and inefficiencies can mean when this government really gets to work.

This bill is pretty short. It has two main pieces to it. One is to essentially give power to the Ministry of Infrastructure to manage government properties, both leases and land that is owned by 14 provincial agencies. Those agencies include Agricorp, EQAO, the Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Creates, Ontario Trillium Foundation, OFA, Fire Marshal's Public Fire Safety Council, Destination Ontario, FSRA, OSC, Human Rights Legal Support Centre, Intellectual Property Ontario, Skilled Trades Ontario and the Higher Education Quality Council.

We've reached out to them this morning just to ask for feedback on this bill, because it's very important when we bring in bills to this Legislature that we take the time to do outreach to the agencies, to the individuals, to the organizations that are going to be impacted by this bill to find out what they think: What do they like? What don't they like? What kind of amendments do they want to see?

It remains to be seen whether the government did that kind of consultation. I guess I'll wait and see and find out.

The second piece of the bill is to accelerate approvals of infrastructure projects by allowing the 30-day period for class EAs—by basically allowing the government to waive the 30-day period that exists after public comments have come in. The whole purpose of having a public

consultation period—time where people can give their feedback in writing—is for the government to consider what Ontarians think about a bill and how it's going to impact them. This government is making the decision to stop even the pretense of caring what people think, and just doing away with it altogether, which is a concern.

I'm going to focus on the first section of the bill, which is about the real estate piece, with the time that I have. I've listed the agencies that are impacted and, in short, these agencies will be prohibited from owning and managing real estate. It requires all real estate to be handed over to the Ministry of Infrastructure.

The first part of this, and I've heard the minister talk about this, is that it would allow the Ministry of Infrastructure to control office leases. You amalgamate agencies; you try and get a good deal with leases so office space is rented out at a good price. On the surface of it, I don't have a lot of problems with that.

One thing that I noticed when the minister was talking is that this is being done because the Auditor General did an investigation into Infrastructure Ontario, which is going to be the likely agency managing this, and actually found out that it's Infrastructure Ontario itself that is doing a bad job at managing office leases. That's interesting that you're potentially going to be handing over these office leases and all this real estate to an agency that doesn't have a very good track record of managing these agencies, these leases and these real estate portfolios. So I'm kind of intrigued by that.

The other thing that I was really intrigued by when I went and printed out the public comments section for the regulation for this section was the part that this decision to consolidate real estate is the first step in a broader plan this government has to centralize real estate under what is essentially a single entity. And when I hear about that, I begin to think about what does this government want to do with the public land that Ontario owns and what could we be doing instead with the public land that Ontario owns? That's where my mind went.

The reason why my mind went there is that Ontario owns a whole lot of public land. And they happen to own public land—not just crown land, but also land in dense urban regions that have extraordinarily high rents and extraordinarily high housing prices. So there's this real opportunity here to use the land that Ontario has to address one of the biggest crises we're facing in Ontario today—it's a generational crisis—and that is housing affordability.

The Centre for Urban Research and Land Development—it's a department within TMU, Toronto Metropolitan University—did a scan to look at how much land Ontario and the federal government and the city own that we could build affordable housing on. They found there's 6,000 government-owned properties in Toronto alone that we could be using to build affordable housing on—very exciting. Maybe, maybe the government is looking at moving ahead and building affordable housing on public land. Maybe this is part of that broader strategy.

Then I thought to myself, "Okay, well, let's take a little bit of a deep dive and look at what the Ontario government, what this government, has done already when it comes to building on government land." I think about the

foundry property in the member of Toronto Centre's riding where this government made a secret deal with Dominion—a very secret deal; we don't even know the details of it today—where Dominion was given the authority to build a whole lot of housing, and very little of it, I would say almost none of it, was affordable—

*Interjections.*

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** The De Gasperis family. Oh, sorry, I forgot. Oh, my goodness. Thank you so much for saying that. We've heard that name before.

Then I think about Mimico GO Station, which is in the riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. There's a big development that went ahead there, and, once again, the deal was secret. It was public land and there was no affordable housing requirement with that land as well.

I think about Ontario Place, also public land, and then I see this government moving ahead with making secret deals with for-profit corporations when this is public land that could be used to deal with and address the crises that we have of our time. Because when I speak to Ontarians, they do not say to me, "We need another spa. What's going to make my life so much better is a spa." No, no, no. They're talking about affordable rent. They're talking about being able to pay the bills.

So that is this government's track record so far over the last four and a half years when it comes to using government land. They've been using it to make secret deals for large condos, lots of housing, and there's next to no affordable housing requirement. I've got a lot concerns about that. The reason why I have a lot of concerns about that is because we should be using this land in ways that will truly tackle the affordable housing crisis.

I think about the value of moving forward with inclusionary zoning so any new development that's built next to a transit station has an affordable housing requirement. The Ontario government gutted that. I have so many big buildings going up in my riding. We do need new housing, but there's no affordable housing requirement in these buildings. It's very concerning.

I think about what's happening in the city of Toronto right now with Housing Now. It's a very innovative program. They're looking at using 21 government-owned sites to build 13,000 homes, and 5,400 of them are affordable. That's a great example of how we can be using public land to tackle the housing supply crisis that we have and the housing affordability crisis that we have in a way that keeps our resources under public control. I'm not seeing it with this government and I'm very concerned about that.

The second bit which I'm just going to conclude on is the government's decision to waive the 30-day waiting period after public consultation has been done on a class EA. This just falls totally within the playbook of how this government treats the natural environment, treats people who don't agree with their values and them, and really has contempt for democratic processes. It falls in line with all that we saw in Bill 23 with the gutting of conservation authorities to share their expertise; with the decision to eliminate planning by upper-tier municipalities; by the decision, with Bill 39, to bring in strong-mayor powers

and do away with representative democracy on some of the most important legislation that Toronto passes, including the city budget. I have a lot of concerns about that and I have a lot concerns about this bill.

1550

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions to the member for University–Rosedale.

**Mr. John Jordan:** There's nothing in this act that compromises the environmental assessment—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. John Jordan:** You're laughing. We've heard it from the minister, we've heard it from the member from Oakville: What this act is actually about is improving the efficiencies of getting things done. That's the 30-day period. They're sensible, practical changes to ensure continued environmental oversight, but committed to eliminating or reducing red tape.

Does the member not believe that improvement to processes is necessary and needed so we can continue to develop this province?

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** I do not believe that public consultation is red tape. I don't believe that we should be doing away with democratic processes because we want to make things more efficient for some people—many of them might be donating to the PC Party—in order for them to make a whole lot of profit.

Often this is done in the guise of building new homes. This party is very much in support of the commitment of building 1.5 million homes across the province. In fact, a recent report came out by a planner from Waterloo, making it very clear that we already have more than enough land already zoned for development.

I also am not a fan of this idea that just because we want proper public consultation—and I want to respect the fact that we live in a democracy—we do not want to build anything. It's just a wrong correlation.

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

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I appreciate the opportunity to pose a question to my colleague from University–Rosedale. In the course of reviewing this bill, you, like I, have felt a great deal of concern about whether or not the government is acting on a good-faith basis when it is trying to reduce environmental protections. Could you cite one or two of the main experiences you've had or seen that would give rise to a person feeling they can't trust this government on environmental issues?

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Thank you to the member for Toronto–Danforth for this question. This government's decision to waive the 30-day waiting period really falls within this overall agenda this government has to do away with necessary and important environmental protections so that we can protect our environment, not just for ourselves but for our children and future generations.

I think about this government's decision to move forward with Bill 23. There are a lot of flaws in Bill 23. I think about this government's decision to move forward with opening up the greenbelt, even though everyone from local municipalities to the farming sector to citizens who care about their natural environment are telling you, "Hey,

hold on. We don't need to open up the greenbelt for us to build the homes that we need for current or future Ontarians."

So there is, yes, a lot of skepticism and mistrust when this government starts talking about doing the right thing for the environment.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Next, the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Just a question for the member: About 15 years ago, under changes to the environmental assessment process for municipalities, cycling infrastructure was exempted from a number of the consultation measures that had previously been required, and that was a way to ensure more got built faster to help promote active living and environmental protection in many ways. You don't see reforms like this as being on par with some of those changes that had happened under the previous Liberal government?

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Thank you to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh for that maybe rhetorical question, I'm not sure. Yes, the Liberal government did have some history in changing the environmental assessment process to weaken it. I also see—I mean, what I'm focusing on right now is the bill that I see in front of me, Bill 69, and it's pretty clear to me that waiving the 30-day waiting period will further weaken the environmental assessment process.

It's 30 days. People take the time to write public comments. It's municipalities that write public comments. It's expert planners. It's the cement industry. It's stakeholders. It's a whole lot of people who take the time to write, and the reason they do it is because they're concerned about how this project or this regulation is going to affect them.

You're government; our job is critics, but I think it's our responsibility to take the time to read it and give it good thought. Waiving that 30 days entirely gives the attitude that you don't really care about what people have to say.

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

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** The question to the member from University–Rosedale is that the government claims that the bill is largely in response to an Auditor General report regarding its management of real estate services. In particular, the Auditor General cited that Infrastructure Ontario has not done a good job of managing real estate assets on behalf of the people of Ontario, in particular its management of private contractors and its uncompetitive bidding process, as well as the lack of managerial oversight of those private contracts.

Is there anything in the bill that actually addresses the concerns that the Auditor General raised, based on her 2017 report?

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Thank you for that question. I have read the bill, I read the corresponding regulations that go with it and I have read the summary notes, and my conclusion is that the Auditor General's criticisms aren't really addressed in this bill. What this bill aims to do is

consolidate the management of properties that are currently being managed by 14 different agencies into the Ministry of Infrastructure's control, and it's very likely that that will then move to Infrastructure Ontario.

The Auditor General's concerns were very much focused on Infrastructure Ontario's failure to get a good deal for taxpayers and not properly doing their job, so I'm not seeing this solving the Auditor General's concerns in that 2017 report.

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

**Mr. David Smith:** I do recognize the loyal opposition and their opposing views to the government side of the House, in terms of bringing their perspective and point of view to what we are discussing here today. I've heard many comments from my government, from the minister to many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, and strongly believe that we are taking steps in the right direction, from the Auditor General's report that we keep talking about, looking to deal with efficiencies.

To get efficiencies, we have to look at that report and work towards saving taxpayers money. If we don't do that, it's saying that we are not doing what the Auditor General's report states. We have zero effect on just about everything in terms of the environment. My question is: Why can't the opposition come along with us on this very vital—why can't the opposition support this bill? Because it's moving in the right direction of more efficiency.

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Thank you to the member for your request that we just come along and don't criticize—you know, "Just shut up and accept it all."

**Mr. David Smith:** That's not what I said.

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Okay. Thank you for clarifying.

My point is this: It's our job to look at this legislation that you're introducing and moving through the House very quickly, and to say, "Hey, look, we've got some genuine concerns with this." When we're talking about public consultation, I'll use Bill 23 as an example. Much of the feedback that we got with Bill 23 was how it would affect one of the biggest sectors that we have in Ontario, which is our farming sector. So when we're talking about growing our province, improving our industries, taking feedback from key stakeholders like the farming sector is pretty important, and that's not about saying no; that's about making sure we make the kinds of decisions that benefit the vast majority of people, so I reject your point a little bit.

1600

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

**Mr. Chris Glover:** It's an honour to rise in the House to speak about Bill 69, the—well, it's called the Reducing Inefficiencies Act, but it's actually the reducing public consultation act.

I'm in the NDP in part because I believe in a progressive society. A progressive society is one in which we leave the next generation with better opportunities than we had ourselves. The most important thing we can do for the next generation is to leave them with a healthy planet, and

yet time and time again, we see this government weakening the Environmental Assessment Act.

We have a history in this province of environmental catastrophes. I'll give a couple of examples. In 1976, I was driving with family—my parents, at the time—to Sudbury, and 30 kilometres outside Sudbury, the trees disappeared. This was because of sulphur dioxide, because of acid rain. All of the lakes within a 30-kilometre circumference of Sudbury were dead, and the trees were dead. This was because of the way that nickel was being smelted in Sudbury that released the sulphur dioxide into the environment. It has taken decades for Sudbury to recover. It has taken millions of dollars and incredible community effort to green Sudbury again. I am happy to say that Sudbury—and I've been up there over the last decade or so—is a green, beautiful city once again. But this environmental catastrophe could have been prevented if we had known what we know nowadays and if we had had an Environmental Assessment Act in place.

Another example: I lived in a small town in northern Ontario that used to have a mine. The tailings from the mine were laid on the ground, and there was mercury in those tailings. The mercury was leaking into the nearby lake, so even though this town was built on a lake, they could not draw their water from that lake because of the mercury poisoning. Again, it took decades—and this was the town of Geraldton. There was a very visionary mayor of that town, Michael Power, and he sealed in the tailings and built a golf course on that site, just to seal it in, so it was possible to remedy the site.

The other example of environmental catastrophe that we had in this province: Grassy Narrows. For four decades, the First Nation community of Grassy Narrows has been dealing with Minamata disease—mercury poisoning—because of a mine that had been located in that area.

We need to protect the environment. We need to make sure that the projects that we undertake in this province protect the environment for future generations. That's what the Environmental Assessment Act is about, and that's why weakening the Environmental Assessment Act with Bill 69 is a step in the wrong direction and it's a step that leaves our next generation vulnerable.

What this act does is it allows the environment minister to waive the 30-day waiting period after the comments have been received as part of a class environmental assessment. So the community gets together, and they provide feedback to the government about a project from an environmental perspective. Normally, the minister has to consider those for a 30-day period. The idea is that the government is actually going to respect the feedback that they get. But what's happening with this legislation is, the government could receive a submission from a community member at 5 o'clock on a Thursday night, and that ends the comment period. The next morning at 9 o'clock in the morning, the minister could go ahead with the project without ever considering that community member's consultation or their input.

And the thing about it is that we in the government do not know everything. We don't have the local knowledge,



and that's why it's really important—when we're passing legislation, particularly legislation that has to do with the environment and the future generations of this province, we have to consider the local input because local community members and agencies and companies have knowledge that we do not have in the government. That's why it's important to have this public consultation.

I'll give you a couple of recent examples where this government has not followed their own legal obligations for public consultation. In January 2019, demolition crews rolled into the foundry site in Toronto Centre, my colleague's riding, and they were going to demolish the foundry, which is a heritage property right in downtown Toronto. It's nestled in a bunch of condos, and the city was already working on ideas on how to redevelop this heritage site. We've seen in the city of Toronto how successful the redevelopment of heritage industrial sites can be. The Distillery District is a huge tourist magnet in downtown Toronto, as well as a wonderful place to live, and the foundry has that kind of potential as well to be an economic generator. But these demolition crews rolled into the site and were prepared to demolish it. The community and my colleague Kristyn Wong-Tam and the MPP at the time, Suze Morrison, and myself, we organized and we worked with save the foundry; we worked with the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association. And we were able to save that site because the government had violated its legal obligations under the heritage act for public consultation.

The other example that I want to give from my community is Ontario Place. Right now, there's a proposal that the government is pursuing, and they're going to be spending an estimated \$650 million redeveloping Ontario Place: \$200 million to bring it up to scale, and then they're going to build an underground parking garage for 2,000 cars. The estimated cost of that kind of parking garage is about \$450 million. So \$650 million of taxpayer dollars is going in to redevelop Ontario Place, only to hand it over to Therme, which is an Austrian spy company—oh, sorry, spa. They're not a spy company. They're a spa, an Austrian spa.

There's nothing wrong with this Austrian spa, except that it has nothing to do with Ontario. Ontario Place was designed to celebrate this province. It was supposed to be a showcase for the province. John Robarts, who was the Premier who announced the project, said that every piece of steel at Ontario Place is being mined and smelted in Ontario. It was designed—it had silos representing our farming area. It had areas representing the Canadian Shield. It was a showcase for the world to come and see what Ontario was all about. Now this government is leasing it out to two private, for-profit companies, neither of which have anything to do with the province of Ontario.

And the other thing about their project is that they're exempting the Therme project from the required environmental assessment because they're arguing that this is being done by a private company and therefore they're exempt from the environmental assessment requirements, when, in fact—and this is the contradiction here—the

government, Infrastructure Ontario, the government's own agency, is the one that submitted the plans for that spa to the city of Toronto. So the government is making two different arguments here, and they're trying to avoid the need for an environmental assessment.

The concern that we have in the community and across Ontario is, first of all, what is the environmental assessment of building what is essentially a 12-acre greenhouse on the waterfront? And the government is also not following its own obligations under the heritage act, and it's skirting its obligations under the Environmental Assessment Act, so it's a real concern that before us in the House today is Bill 69, which further weakens the requirements for environmental assessment.

**1610**

I ask the government to reconsider, to actually respect and make sure that future generations have a healthy planet to inherit and stop weakening the Environmental Assessment Act.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions?

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** Thanks to the member opposite for his presentation.

As we all have been discussing about this bill, this bill makes it very crystal clear that the environmental assessment standards will remain in place. For example, assessing potential environmental impacts remains in place; identifying mitigation measures are in place; and, of course, the consultation with Indigenous communities, the public and stakeholders are in place.

What this bill does is, after the successful completion of an environmental assessment, if there's no other outstanding concerns, it will allow the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to waive the 30-day waiting period. That's exactly so it is cutting the long red tape here.

My question to the member opposite is, why does the NDP want to add red tape and slow down the government?

**Mr. Chris Glover:** If there are no outstanding concerns, if the community has not put in any comments to the consultation process, then the project can go ahead. But that's not what's in this legislation. What's in this legislation is that the minister no longer has to consider the comments that they're getting and the feedback that they're getting from the community.

Cindy Wilkey, a community member in Spadina in my riding, talked about this. She's also the head of Ontario Place for All. She says this bill "is a further step in making public consultation an empty formality." It means that the government will not be benefiting from the local knowledge that people have. It's disrespectful not just to my community, it's disrespectful to community members across this province because this government will not actually be considering the local knowledge that they could bring to these projects.

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

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I really want to thank the MPP for Spadina-Fort York for reminding us of some of the environmental disasters that we are still paying the price

for and reminding us of the importance of why environmental assessments are in place.

I also just would like to highlight that this is a government that doesn't believe in environmental assessments and calls them burdensome. The Minister of the Environment said that, in fact, they're nonsensical this morning. And they've exempted themselves from the Bradford Bypass, a huge highway project that goes through the greenbelt, that bisects rivers, that goes through the Holland Marsh, and they don't feel that an environmental assessment is necessary.

It's bad enough that they disrespect the environment, but the fact that people take the time to care about their community, they take the time to give public comment, and this government is clearly thumbing their nose at them by deciding that they will not take that into account when they make their decision.

Would you like to speak a little further on how people feel outraged by the betrayal of the environment and of their transparent opportunity to have public input into their communities?

**Mr. Chris Glover:** When you try to avoid environmental assessment, the environment will do the assessment. The environment will push back. So if you destroy the environment, if you pave over wetlands, the next time there's a hurricane—which is what this government has tried to do with the Duffins wetlands—when you pave over wetlands, the next time a hurricane comes through, like Hurricane Hazel, there will be death and destruction.

This is the lesson that we learned from Hurricane Hazel. There were houses in Etobicoke floating down the Humber River and people died because of Hurricane Hazel, because we built in the ravines. So then, in Toronto, we protected those wetlands and created the ravines, including the Humber River, the Don Valley, the Rouge River—all these protected wetlands.

If you don't do the environmental assessment, the next time there's an environmental catastrophe, it will be magnified because you didn't do your homework.

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

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** This bill would bring us one step closer to the almost 50-year-old environmental assessment process that is slow, costly and burdensome. This bill will do that without compromising on environmental standards and protection. As I mentioned to the member from Spadina–Fort York, this will happen after the successful completion of the complete environmental assessment, if there are no other outstanding concerns. There is a 30-day waiting period. My question to the member opposite is, what do you think happens in the 30-day waiting period when there are no other concerns, when the full completion of the environmental assessment is over?

**Mr. Chris Glover:** My colleague just mentioned the highways that this government is building. I am deeply, deeply concerned about the disaster that this government is marching us toward. We've got a climate emergency. The Financial Accountability Office says that the cost in infrastructure damage from environmental catastrophes over the next few decades will be \$170 billion. If you

magnify that damage by continuing to pave over wetlands because you're not doing an environmental assessment, the price will actually double for future generations, up to \$340 billion.

You think that you're saving money, you think that you're being efficient, but in the long-term, future generations are going to pay billions of dollars for the mistakes that this government is making right now.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The next question will be the member for University–Rosedale.

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** I just want to recognize Kevin Modeste. He's come to visit us. Hi, Kevin, nice to see you here. He can't stay away; it's so exciting here.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Is he okay?

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** I know, right?

My question is to the member for Spadina–Fort York. You've talked a lot about the environmental assessment process and, like you, I really wonder why you would want to get rid of that 30-day period just to read some of the comments that people give. They take their time to give them.

I also was wanting to ask your opinion on the second piece, which is really around consolidating real estate into the Ministry of Infrastructure. Why would they be doing that? Do you have any concerns about that?

**Mr. Chris Glover:** Thank you to the member for University–Rosedale for that question. I have real concern about this government's abuse of their powers over the real estate that belongs to the people of this province. The greenbelt: Somehow, these developers were able to buy greenbelt-protected properties in September and, six weeks later, the government introduces legislation to remove those greenbelt protections and that property has increased in value tenfold.

When this government is consolidating all of the government's land holdings into one body, it's deeply concerning. Because the record of this government is that they make secret deals with developers—like they did with the foundry—and then they start to demolish heritage buildings and they start to pave over wetlands.

My question to the government is: Are you consolidating all of the people of Ontario's land holdings into one body so that you can more efficiently sell it off?

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

**Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam:** As I mentioned earlier, this bill checkmarks environmental assessment. It will properly checkmark environmental protection and, of course, any other outstanding concerns. This will only waive the 30-day waiting period. It does slow down a proponent from getting shovels in the ground, not just for one month; it could be maybe a season or two.

My question to the member opposite, the member for Spadina–Fort York, is: Why does the NDP want to slow down the process for 30 days after the full completion of the environmental assessment, after there are no outstanding concerns? Why do they want to slow it down?

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I don't think the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park understands the purpose of consultation. The purpose of consultation is that you go to

the community to get the local knowledge that they have on the project that's being proposed and then you consider that feedback. If you don't consider the feedback, then you've really disrespected the local community members who actually took the time to prepare the consultation submissions.

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So if you're not going to actually consider it, why bother doing it? If it's just a rubber stamp, if you're just going to take the consultation submissions but not actually listen to them, not actually read them, then what's the point in doing the consultation at all? I think it's incredibly disrespectful, and I think this legislation is disrespectful to local community members who actually take the time to give feedback to the government.

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

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I have to say, I'm surprised the government isn't standing up defending this substantial bill before us, but they aren't, so here I am.

There are a few things I want to say about the bill before I go into detail. One is that environmental assessments are one of the few tools that people have to protect their interests and to protect the larger interests of Ontarians around environmental issues. When you propose changes that don't, in fact, enhance protection of the environment or the population, one has to be very suspicious about what those changes really will deliver on.

We believe that the environment, those of us who depend on the environment—so all living humans—should be protected, and we have grave concern about this proposal to reduce the period for consideration of commentary by people on environmental initiatives.

I have to say, Speaker, you've sat through question period on a regular basis. You, for your sins, have sat in that chair when we've debated bills. You have heard what goes on or does not go on in committees. And as you're well aware, interest in commentary or public input is extraordinarily low. This government, in its behaviour towards environmental matters, has a very consistent record, and that is one of ignoring environmental concerns. This is a government that's involved right now in carving up the greenbelt, involved in deals that are generally seen as shady, smelly, smoky—take your pick.

When you have a government that is undermining its own credibility by not trying to appear above reproach, you have to ask substantial questions about what actually is going to happen when even the smaller changes to environmental protection are undermined.

We've seen in the past the abuse of ministerial zoning orders to ram through developer deals despite the opposition of local communities, except, of course, when a minister's interests are involved, as a minister in northern Toronto was upset about some low-income housing—that being put on the back burner.

And as my colleague from Spadina-Fort York can attest in great detail, this is a government spending about \$650 million of public money which is going to enable the giveaway of a massive chunk of Ontario Place to a for-profit company based out of Austria. Ontario Place is a lakefront

park meant for all Ontarians, not to be sold off. Any other park that you start selling off chunks of, in this city or anywhere else in the province, raises substantial questions. This government is just acting as if this is normal, and to be fair, for them, it is normal.

So let's look at what's in the bill. Schedule 1, the Environmental Assessment Act: It's an amazingly small bill, so I'll just give it the quick treatment. The changes to the Environmental Assessment Act allow the environment minister to waive the 30-day waiting period currently required following the end of a class EA comment before granting an approval to proceed with an undertaking.

Speaker, the reason you have a waiting period is the assumption that the minister will actually think about what came in. It will provide a period when those who have participated in any consultation process will have an opportunity informally to go to the minister and say, "An awful lot of people have concerns here. You have the power to address those concerns. We ask you, Minister, to address them."

The other part of this bill, Ministry of Infrastructure Act, allows the ministry to assume control of real estate interests of prescribed entities that currently manage their own real estate interests. Now, this is fascinating: The real estate services for these entities will presumably move to Infrastructure Ontario, which oversees real estate services for most government properties.

What's interesting here is that apparently the government claims that this change—giving more power to Infrastructure Ontario—is a response to the Auditor General's 2017 report on real estate. I went and looked at the Auditor General's report. She was pretty tough on what was going on, on what was being done by Infrastructure Ontario, and I don't see anything in this bill, nor have I heard any public statement from the government, that they're actually going to deal with the problems at Infrastructure Ontario. Manifests that were called out, pointed out in 2017—I'll just note a few. In 2017, the Auditor General found that "Almost \$19 million was spent in" one year "on operating and maintaining 812 vacant buildings."

That's a lot of buildings, if you're just pouring money out and you're not using places—money that could be used for housing, could be used for upgrading other buildings. Possibly the vacant buildings could be used to relocate government services so that we aren't paying rent to someone else. That doesn't strike me as a very well-managed portfolio.

She noted, "Capital repair funds" were being "used to fund operating costs for managing government properties."

I used to be a property manager in the co-op housing sector. I didn't use capital funds for operating. And I'll be honest; I mean, I picked it up as I went along. I went to a few workshops. I talked to others, talked to property managers, and they were all pretty clear: You don't mix the two streams, not if you're running an above-board shop. So that is a real concern.

The Auditor General also noted, "Office space per person exceeds the Ministry standard." So we were spending more overall on real estate than we needed to. That's the agency that the government wants to move more real estate control into.

I haven't heard—and maybe I will be surprised. Maybe I will be shocked, Speaker, and go home tonight and say, “I had no idea.” Maybe the government has dramatically reformed Infrastructure Ontario so that none of these things would be repeated. However, I have my doubts.

I also want to say a bit more about the environmental assessment end. As I said before, the reason for the 30 days is to give people an opportunity—sorry, bureaucracy and political decision-makers—some time to think about what's at hand. One would hope that having explored, having investigated, having listened to the people, that a thoughtful bureaucrat, a thoughtful minister would take corrective action where necessary or conclude that the information given has validated the initial assumptions. One of the questions that came up earlier to one of my colleagues was about the need for efficiency and deregulation. I don't know about you, but I was around when the Walkerton water crisis happened. Deregulation—voluntary rules instead of actual regulation—were central to that crisis, that catastrophe, that loss of life. An initiative to peel away regulations that protect life and health make no sense to me. That is not efficiency; that is irresponsibility.

I'll give you another example of deregulation on a larger scale that didn't involve tainted water but did involve tainted finances. You were here, I think, Speaker, in 2008, during the international financial crisis. We grilled the government of the day about their behaviour. They actually bought into it. They had hundreds of millions of dollars of—what can I say?—paper assets that were of no consequence anymore, and we went after them on that. People should understand that that crisis at heart was a failure of the regulatory system, that the companies that packaged and sold those junk financial products were unregulated.

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So when a government pursues a deregulation strategy, I see both tainted water and financial chaos. And in both cases, in the aftermath—at least with the water, some steps were taken substantially to protect people's health. I think with regard to the financial crisis, not as many steps were taken. That remains a work in progress—well, a work unfinished and untouched.

Speaker, I don't support this bill, and I don't have confidence that the government will protect either our real estate holdings or the environment.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions for the member for Toronto–Danforth?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to address this bill on an impromptu basis yesterday. I was really struck by the long list of different government agencies that had real-estate-making authority. In fact, the list was so long that somebody had to actually write it down for me and pass it to me so that I could read the list. It was so long I couldn't remember it. There were 14 agencies on it, and it really struck me, gosh, that's a lot of organizations, all that have real-estate-making authority for the government of the province of Ontario.

So my question to the member from Toronto–Danforth is the following: Is 14 different government agencies making real estate decisions too many, is it too few or is it just the right amount?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I thank the member for Essex for the question. It's a good one. I don't know what the optimal number is. I do know that the agencies that are listed, generally speaking, have negligible holdings. And I do know Infrastructure Ontario in 2017 was the object of a scathing report by the Auditor General on poor practice.

So if you're in fact moving real estate holdings, and maybe relatively small ones, to an agency that has been found—let's be generous—wanting by the Auditor General, I have to ask, why on earth are you doing it? Why are you not taking steps in this bill to set standards for management of real estate so that we aren't paying millions of dollars for vacant properties, so that we aren't over-housing our workforce, so that we aren't mixing our capital on our operating funds? If you were doing that, I think that would be a far more interesting debate. I don't think 14 or 20 or five is the critical thing; I think the critical thing is, do you have good management practice? I have no assurance that, in fact, is what will come out of this bill.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions?

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** Thank you to the member for Toronto–Danforth for taking the time to look into the Auditor General's report and sharing with the House what the Auditor General found when they did a deep dive into Infrastructure Ontario.

I've just got a general question: When this government is looking at changing the environmental assessment process again—I would call it weakening the environmental assessment process. What are the consequences of weakening the environmental assessment process? What happens when you start doing things like that?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Member for University–Rosedale, thank you for that question. Interestingly, my colleague from Spadina–Fort York touched on that earlier, in his commentary. When you do not actually take steps to ensure that environmental protections are in place, you can not only set up a situation where you damage the natural world, but you can also put people's lives and property at risk. If you do not in fact have in place flood protection, then the potential is there that people's homes will be flooded, that they will incur tens of thousands—if not hundreds of thousands—of dollars in damages to their home.

You may well be aware, Speaker, that within the past few years, in New York City, a very severe storm caused about a dozen people to drown in their basement apartments. So if you do not actually pay attention to environmental standards, environmental issues, you put at risk life and property—and health, may I add. So undermining those protections that, over decades, we've built up makes no sense at all.

I'll just note, again, if I have time, the recent example in East Palestine, Ohio, where the railroad disaster, in many cases, is being attributed to deregulations by the Trump administration. Environmental assessment, health and safety regulations are all part of the same package. If you neglect them, you put people's lives, property and health at risk.

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

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** My thanks to the member for Davenport for participating this afternoon. I have to say, it was very interesting to hear the member opposite speak

with such concern about a piece of legislation that is going to ensure that we have more efficient government. But I think the take-away I had from it—and it's a bit of a surprising one, given the feedback that I've heard from the member opposite over the last few years—is that he seems to think that the PC government, under the leadership of Premier Doug Ford, is already so efficient that this bill unnecessary. He seems to think that we don't need to have a bill that's reducing inefficiencies here in the government of Ontario. I can't speak for all my colleagues, but I can testify that the attitude the Premier brings forward is that better is always possible.

My question to the member opposite is, if he believes that we are such an efficient government already, does he also not believe that better is always possible and that we need to make sure we're passing legislation such as this to address any inefficiencies that might still exist?

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I'm very appreciative that the member asked that question, because sometimes assuming the basis for my logic leads to an error. I don't think this is an efficient government at all. I think this is an outrageously inefficient government.

I was talking to a small landlord last night. He's got a condo on Carlaw Avenue in my riding, and he can't get a hearing at the Landlord and Tenant Board. Why is that? Because you guys didn't appoint people at the level necessary to have proper functioning of that board. That's not efficiency; that is neglect. That means tenants are getting beat up. That means that small landlords are getting beat up. That's not efficiency. You know what that is: That's chaos.

When you bring forward a bill that says that you're going to sort out the real estate issues, do you actually have standards within the bill saying that you can't have a huge portfolio of vacant buildings that we're paying for? That we're going to have a standard for space per employee that doesn't mean we're overhoused and, thus, wasting money—which is what you're doing. You're not setting a standard. You're turning it all over to an agency that the Auditor General raked over the coals.

If you want efficiency, set smart standards and enforce them. When you actually start doing that, I might think that you're trying to deal with efficiency. Right now, all you're interested in is deregulation, and making some people incredibly wealthy and making other people eat that in terms of risk to their lives and property and in terms of their health.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Spadina–Fort York.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I thank the member from Toronto–Danforth for his comments today. This government has got quite the record on real estate holdings, and these are the holdings that actually belong to the people of this province.

We've seen them try to pave over the Duffins wetlands for a deal that they've made, apparently, with the developer, who's going to be leasing it out to Walmart or Costco. Then there was another deal, the foundry. They've made a deal with the developer to demolish these heritage buildings at the foundry.

At Ontario Place, they've made a deal with two international private, for-profit companies that have nothing to do with Ontario, and they've committed Ontarians to spending an estimated \$650 million to prepare the site, only to hand it over on a long-term lease to this private, for-profit company.

The second part of this bill actually consolidates the real estate holdings of the people of this province in one agency. Do you have confidence, based on their lack of stewardship of public property, that this will lead to better performance, that this will lead to actual proper stewardship of the land and the property that belongs to the people of this province?

1640

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I have to say to the member, I wish I had written that question to give to you so that I could claim credit for it, because I enjoyed it so much.

First, I'll be direct right off the top: No, I don't have confidence that they'll actually manage this properly or look after the public interest. The Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve came into existence because the people of Ontario put big bucks into it; they preserved that land. It's part of flood control. It's part of agriculture production. We're seeing it being dismantled by this government, who is effectively transferring wealth in the hundreds of millions of dollars into the hands of speculators. I would say that anyone who does that, any government that does that, has abandoned even the most simple principles of government, which is to sell things off at a profit rather than give them away to friends who will sell them off at a profit. I find it extraordinary that they would do it. I don't find it extraordinary that they would attack the environment to that extent.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Spadina–Fort York has a point of order.

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I'm wondering if I could beg the indulgence of the House. On March 1, 1958, my parents were married. Yesterday marked the 65th wedding anniversary for Len and Gwen Glover, and I'm wondering if I could have a round of applause from the members of the House. Thank you.

*Applause.*

**Mr. Chris Glover:** And that their marriage even survived raising me, I don't know how that is. Thank you very much, everybody.

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

**Mr. John Vanthof:** It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House and debate the issues of the day and today Bill 69, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to infrastructure. This bill talks about consolidation of real estate holdings of the province and about a change to the Environmental Assessment Act.

Many of you may know, and for those of you who didn't, you're going to find out: I'm actually here because of the Environmental Assessment Act. I have an interest in the Environmental Assessment Act because we fought a large issue in my part of the world and it was fully approved under the Environmental Assessment Act. The local people didn't believe that it was fairly approved,

accurately approved. We continued to fight it and this Legislature passed a law stopping that project. But in that process, I was personally sued by the proponent of the project—and I don't blame the proponent, actually. The Adams Mine Lake Act stopped the project, but I almost lost my farm because it didn't do anything about the SLAPP suit.

I was approached by the New Democratic Party to run in a provincial election to bring focus on that issue. I ran in that provincial election for the one goal, to bring focus to that lawsuit, to hopefully get rid of it, and however that happened, three days before the writ dropped, the company dropped the lawsuit.

I didn't win that election. We came within 634 votes, I believe, of taking out a very popular cabinet minister, a very good MPP: Mr. David Ramsay. And Mr. David Ramsay announced his retirement and we came so close that I thought, "You know what? If I don't try again, I might never know if I can do this job." And I'm still trying to figure that out.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** So are we.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I appreciate that. I really do appreciate that.

That's how I got here. So my ears always perk up when I hear about the Environmental Assessment Act and when I hear words like, "We have the strongest Environmental Assessment Act in the province, in the world." I always, "Okay, but." No one wants red tape, but we do want regulations that actually work.

We're currently dealing in my riding with an issue that has to do with the Environmental Assessment Act. I've brought this issue up several times in the Legislature. I'm going to bring it up again today.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Please.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Thank you. In my riding recently we had an abandoned dairy farm with a manure structure. That manure structure was enlarged and now it is a receptacle for raw, untreated human sewage, imported from Quebec and spread on those fields—

**Mr. Will Bouma:** Not your old farm.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Not my farm—fully approved by the ministry. There is no legislation against it. It did go through an EA. There are some issues with that process.

I give credit where credit is due: The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks has looked into this issue. We don't agree on exactly everything that's wrong, but he did take the time—I would say he's knee-deep in this issue.

**Mr. Will Bouma:** That's almost a double entendre.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Some people got it. The main issue is, it's former dairy lagoon storage, manure storage. When we approached the ministry to ask if they had taken into account the infrastructure that could be around an abandoned dairy farm, we were told by the ministry, "No, this is a new containment. It is not an abandoned dairy farm."

Okay, everyone in my part of the world knows that was a dairy farm. They milked 100 cows there. Some of the buildings are still there and the lagoon is still there. So we

asked about the well and we were told there was no well, even though the site was approved. It was engineered and approved. All the boxes were clicked.

Now, everyone knew there was a well there, but the consultation process—under the rules, the way I understand them, everyone within 500 metres of the site has to be notified. The two places that were notified had a personal relationship with the person applying for the business and there was no other notification, except on the Environmental Registry. If there is no public notification, how do you actually get the right information?

The site was approved, there was sewage being dumped into it, and everyone except the MOE knew there was an abandoned well on that property—everyone. Yet all the boxes were clicked. We kept pushing and at some point the MOE realized, yes, there is an abandoned well. It has never been decommissioned and we're going to have to look into that. Then the MOE kicked into gear.

Again, I'm not blaming the ministry for this. There's something wrong with the process, because the purpose of consultation is to find the most information that you can. When everyone around the neighbourhood knew there was a well there, but no one in the neighbourhood knew that that construction site—they saw there were backhoes building something, but they didn't know it was going to be a human storage lagoon. And when we, including myself, went to the MOE we were told, "No, no, no, you're wrong. This is a new site." No, no, no.

Then, when they did acknowledge there was a well there, it became apparent that part of the concrete from the original farm was in the storage lagoon. And anyone who knows anything about farms—there's all kinds of pipes under concrete. All of a sudden, it was then an emergency because that well could be connected to that lagoon underneath that concrete, and the concrete was in the plans of the structure. So they told me, "No, this is not an old dairy lagoon," but the legacy concrete from the farm was in the plans.

**1650**

So something is wrong with the system. I'm not blaming anyone within the ministry, but the consultation sucked because it didn't do its job. Now we are still wondering about other legacy infrastructure underneath the ground at that site, because in the clay belt in Timiskaming, we've got 100 feet of clay and it's very impervious. It's great for earth and lagoons. But that farm has been there for a long time, so for the last 100 years, those farmers have been doing everything they can to drain that impervious clay. So all around that site, there could be random tiles, systematic tiles, pipes—we don't know what they did in the last 100 years, and we don't see there's been any account for it.

So when people tell me that we've got the best environmental assessment system in the country, I question it, because 20 years ago, when we brought up issues on Adams mine, we were told, "Oh, no, no, no. You're wrong." And now, 20 years later, on a smaller project, we got the same answer: "No, no, no. That's not right." And

again, we had to push to make them acknowledge there was a well.

There's something wrong with our system, and changing these periods isn't going to make it better.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Questions to the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane?

**Mr. Will Bouma:** I always enjoy our conversations, both here and outside of here, with the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane. In fact, as I look around the room this afternoon, I am so pleased to know that everyone I see in here is in here for the right reasons, and that's because they care about their communities deeply. That kind of goes against the grain of what you read in the media today, actually, about how all politicians are liars and in it for bags of money and things like that. But I appreciate knowing that I have colleagues on the opposite of the side of the House—even though we're on the same side of the House—who feel the same way about their communities as I do.

My question is—continuous improvement. What I see in this bill is a small step on the path—a thousand miles starts with one step—of continuous improvement. I was just wondering if the member could say that looking for continuous improvement in the actions that we take as government is a good thing and that we should continue to do so?

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I thank you for the sincerity of that question. I would like to respond, in all sincerity, that I'm not sure that taking out potential time in the comment period is an improvement, because the consultation period in the waste lagoon didn't work, because it was over and no one knew what was happening. So I'm not sure if this is an improvement, and I say that with all sincerity.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Toronto-St. Paul's.

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to our member for, once again, a passionate presentation.

I want to reiterate in this House that it was the Conservative government that slashed the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario's office. To me, that really does demonstrate a lack of sincerity with regard to our environment.

So the environmental assessment period—I understand the government wants to waive the 30 days, which takes away an opportunity for folks to speak up and share their concerns. Learning about the bill and chatting with some folks, I understand that issues near and dear to Indigenous community members may be missed if those comments aren't listened to by the government.

Communities that are concerned with environmental racism, with gentrification, with overdevelopment pushing them out will not be heard by the government with that 30-day waiver.

I'm wondering if the member can share with us what they feel is the purpose. What is the purpose of removing that 30-day opportunity to hear from our communities? How are community members to trust what this government has to say if they are removing an opportunity for transparency and accountability, if they're removing the voice of the community members impacted by these environmental assessments?

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Thank you very much for that question. I can't speak for what the government's purpose is; I'm not saying it's nefarious. But I can say that the consultation process on this project didn't work, so the neighbours don't think much of the consultation process. Now, this bill is kind of telling them, "Well, it really didn't matter because, technically, we don't have to listen to the consultation anyway because we can start right after the process. So we're not that concerned with your comments because although we're not trying that hard to get them, we're not going to take the time to listen to them anyway potentially."

I'm not saying that's with every project, but that's what this bill says to me, as someone who has experienced, twice in my life, problems with the MOE. I'm concerned that this bill is not sending the right message to people—not for the government, either. They need to believe that the assessment process works.

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

**Mr. Will Bouma:** I did listen intently to the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane's presentation, and I was intrigued by it. I can't argue with the facts that he puts before us because I haven't looked into that myself. I am pleased that he was able to give a compliment to the Minister of the Environment who's now looking into some of those processes that need to be resolved.

What I don't see is a connection between the amount of time that EA consultation took and the fact it wasn't done correctly, from what you said. I don't know if changing the time frame on that would have had a negative impact on that so much. So I was curious what his link is between his presentation and what we're trying to do to speed things up as far as timing goes. I mean, if the process isn't done right, it's not done right regardless of the time, and so I was wondering if he could connect those dots here in debate.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Thank you for the question. It's actually a really good question. If the perception is already that the intent to actually consult people wasn't really properly done, or the boxes were checked, but in the country it just didn't work right, and then the perception is it doesn't really matter because as soon as the consultation process is over, which people in our part of the world don't think is actually respected anyway, then as soon as it's over the minister can move in anyway—so, really, the whole process then, specifically in this project, doesn't pass the smell test.

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

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** The presentation was extremely helpful. I wanted to share with you an experience I've had at city council where I've seen different types of environmental assessments placed before different Ministers of the Environment in different administrations and, depending on the type of assessment and what the cities were oftentimes asking for, you would get different speeds of response. For example, assessments around bike lanes or perhaps sidewalk widening and inclusion of bike lanes and road narrowing—it takes a long time for any Minister of the Environment to come out and approve it. Assessments with respect to urban sprawl that

may have impact on endangered species or perhaps has impacts on flood protection, sometimes that happens a little quicker.

But in this legislation, the schedule allows the minister to use discretion on whether or not she then waives the 30-day notice, but there's no prescription to what would lead them to that decision. Does that trouble the member of the House?

1700

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Thank you. That's actually a very good question. The minister, as part of the minister's duty, has discretion on many issues, but there should be some kind of parameter on what that discretion is, because this government has—and I'm just using this government; we have vast disagreements in principle on the greenbelt and on some other things, and we would question some of the minister's discretion.

Ministers need to have the ability to make decisions, but the decisions need to be encompassed in something that people have faith in. If you have good regulations and effective regulations—the idea is not to slow things down; if people have faith in the process, it should speed it up. When people don't have faith, that's when they start putting spokes in the wheels, even maybe if the wheels should be turning. People need to have faith, and every time that they see something that's just, you know—you lose faith in the system. You lose faith in the system.

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

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** My thanks to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane for his participation this afternoon. I appreciated hearing from him with regard to some of the impetus behind his involvement in provincial politics. It's always important to remember those anchoring moments and why we got involved.

I thought he spoke very well about some of his particular concerns or perspectives around different aspects of the legislation. I don't think we would have some of the same experience or perspective on it.

I'm wondering if you could speak a little about the real estate management aspect of the legislation. I think it is an important part of it. I think having that management in place is key, so for the last 30 seconds, over to you to speak about the real estate part.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** Thank you for the question and thank you for allowing me to talk about the other part of the bill. The Auditor General was fairly critical of Infrastructure Ontario in how they manage their portfolio. This bill takes a lot of agencies and puts them under Infrastructure Ontario. I don't see anything in the bill that is directed to improve how Infrastructure Ontario manages the assets of the province, so I'm not sure this is a direct improvement. Some of the other agencies might be doing a better job than Infrastructure Ontario; we don't know.

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

Ms. Surma has moved second reading of Bill 69, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to infrastructure.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

*Second reading vote deferred.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Orders of the day?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Speaker, I think if you'll seek it, you'll find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Is there consent in the House to see the clock at 6? Agreed? Agreed. It's 6 o'clock.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

### CANCER SCREENING

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** I move that, in the opinion of the House, the government of Ontario should follow the lead of eight other Canadian provinces and ensure PSA testing is an eligible procedure under OHIP for individuals referred by their health care provider.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Thanks for allowing me to rise today and discuss this important motion. As many of you are aware, this is not the first time I have spoken on this issue of PSA testing coverage in this province: I have had the privilege of bringing this motion forward twice in the past. I intend to continue my advocacy until they can ensure that this test falls under OHIP with a doctor's referral. It is important that we come together and remove the existing barriers to receiving this test when making a shared decision with your health care provider.

However, before I begin my speech today, I want to take some time to thank the Canadian Cancer Society for all their hard work and their advocacy on this issue. I'd also like to thank Anthony Henry, who is here in the gallery. Thanks for coming. I really appreciate it. Anthony is someone who has not only been greatly impacted by prostate cancer, but he's also an activist. He works every day to educate Black men about prostate cancer, the increased risk to them and the importance of screening. He works through the Walnut Foundation and the Canadian Cancer Society and is helping to save lives. Thank you for that. I'm proud to share your story today and I thank you for being here.

Mr. Speaker, today isn't a day to sit back and discuss stats and numbers on the problems of prostate cancer. It's a day to face the human side of this health issue. In 2022, nearly 1,800 people were projected to die from prostate cancer in this province. That number is way too high. That means that five men are going to die today from prostate cancer. If we, as legislators, can reduce that number by even one by passing this motion, our work is worthwhile,



because, at the end of the day, that one life was somebody's father, grandfather, son or partner. It was a person in this world who was valued, and they did not deserve to have their life cut short.

Right now in the province of Ontario, the PSA tests are not fully covered. Quite frankly, that's a shame. These simple blood tests are a key screening tool for early detection of prostate cancer. This is also very important. Eight other provinces in Canada cover the test. They saw the importance of it. It removes the barriers for early detection and saves lives. It's time that Ontario follows their lead.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the details on how important this test is and the real life consequences that exist when we continue to put up barriers for testing, I want to talk about the history of how this motion came to be. It was in 2018. I was knocking on doors in Fort Erie—many of us do that during campaigns. A number of men at the door stopped me and asked why the test wasn't covered. They asked why the PSA test wasn't covered, forcing them to pay nearly \$50 out of their pocket, which they couldn't afford. I was actually stumped. I honestly never realized such an important, vital test wasn't fully covered by our health insurance in Ontario. It felt wrong.

So after the campaign, my staff and I dug into the issue. We worked with Prostate Cancer Canada, now part of the Canadian Cancer Society, and learned about the lack of coverage and the importance of this test. I felt it was important that we acted, and the more we looked into it, the more we recognized how much prostate cancer has affected the lives of people around us, because it's not just the man or somebody who has a prostate who ends up suffering, it's the family.

Two of my staff out of the three staff I have, fathers, have survived prostate cancer, both thanks to early detection from PSA tests. My father-in-law also had prostate cancer. My good friend Larry Gibson told me he was diagnosed with prostate cancer because of a PSA test and that early detection saved his life. That experience inspired Larry. He thought everyone should have access to the PSA test, so Larry started a golf tournament at the club he owns to raise money. Each year, we participate in the tournament and Larry uses those funds to pay for PSA tests for those who can't afford it.

Anthony from Walnut Foundation also works in a similar way to take down barriers to testing by paying for men's PSA tests. Thank you for doing that. It's so important. That shouldn't be the case. We shouldn't have to run golf tournaments to cover the costs of a test that should be part of our universal health care system.

Mr. Speaker, the time to act is now. One in eight men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime. That would be over 10,000 in Ontario last year. For many, this is a terrifying reality. To be diagnosed with cancer is life-altering. It changes your entire world and your family's.

**1710**

But if detected early—and this is important—the survival rate is impressive. Nearly 100% of people diagnosed

early will survive at least five years or more. Early detection is the key. The survival rate for those diagnosed late with advanced prostate cancer is 29%. What you would prefer for your father or your grandfather: 100% or 29%? I think it's a fair question.

For those worried about the cost, it's extremely low. I know my Conservative colleagues like to whittle away at our public services and reduce costs, but including this test would cost as little as \$3 million annually and save close to \$60 million in the health care system. Think about that. If the PSA test is insured—and this is really interesting—the lab will pay the bill of the Ministry of Health. They bill them just \$9.50 per test. But if it's uninsured and the patient goes, he must pay between \$35 and \$57 out of pocket, depending on the test. Think about that for a second. Can we afford this?

Considering you have held back billions in spending, I hope you can find it in your heart to approve such a limited expense which literally saves lives in this province. But at the end of the day, that shouldn't matter. We have the ability to fundamentally alter the health outcome of people in this province. It's an opportunity to allow people more time with those they love. How could any government say no to that? The evidence is clear on early detection. We can't continue to ignore it. The costs and stats on survival rates are important, but there's a real human side to this cancer.

I'd also like to take some time today to discuss the story of someone who is living with prostate cancer and how important a PSA test is to them. First off, I can't thank him enough for coming, and I'm so grateful for everything that you do to bring awareness to testing of prostate cancer and the importance of early detection. I mentioned him already, but today in the gallery is Anthony Henry, who has dedicated many hours of his life for something so important. So thank you.

Mr. Speaker, Anthony, unfortunately, has a significant family history of prostate cancer. His father didn't receive a PSA test, and he passed away from stage four prostate cancer at the age of 68. Anthony's brothers and uncles have both been impacted by prostate cancer.

Because of the family history and the experience with his father, Anthony began getting regular PSA tests when he turned 40—and the age is important. In 2015, his PSA levels jumped significantly, and he had a biopsy. Unfortunately, that biopsy found that he did indeed have prostate cancer. In the case of Anthony, early detection—he was advised to watch and have active surveillance. The message that Anthony wants to provide to men, especially those with a family history of prostate cancer: Talk to your health provider and get a PSA test. Stay on top of your health. It could save your life.

But we as government need to remove barriers for getting that test. There should be no deterrent to taking care of your own health. It should be a joint decision with your doctor. It's that simple.

It's important that we also recognize the equality issue we have with prostate cancer. There is data and background that show Black men of African or Caribbean

background have a much higher chance of getting prostate cancer. Statistics show that Black men of African or Caribbean background have almost double the risk of developing prostate cancer compared to non-Black men. They're also more likely to have prostate tumours that grow and spread quickly and are 2.2 times more likely to die from prostate cancer compared to other men.

Even with this information alone, we should be pushing to include PSA testing coverage based on shared decisions with your physician when we know there are higher risks in certain groups.

I understand that the federal clinical guidelines do not recommend screening with PSA tests for those with moderate risk. But those guidelines need updating, as they do not meet the needs of high-risk men. The Canadian Cancer Society recommended men and their health care providers make a joint decision on whether to undergo PSA testing after discussing the benefits and limitations of testing, personal values, preference and individual risk. There are numerous international health care organizations that share this shared decision. Research has been conducted since federal guidelines were introduced in 2014—10 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, together we can do something meaningful for the people of the province of Ontario. We can reduce one more barrier and potentially save lives. I truly hope for support from all parties on this motion and together we can work together to better health outcomes for all. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

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

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I want to thank the member from Niagara Falls for bringing forward this motion again. I think I was here the last time he brought it forward, and I know he's very committed on this issue. I also want to thank Mr. Anthony Henry, the guest who is in the gallery here, for all the hard work that he's doing to educate people, particularly in the Black community, about prostate cancer.

Cancers touch all of us. I can disclose that there's prostate cancer in my family as well, so I certainly empathize with people wanting to make sure that we do everything we can to support people with cancers here in Ontario.

Our government invests in cancer care through Ontario Health, who is our adviser on cancer and renal systems; it was the former Cancer Care Ontario. We flow about \$2 billion to hospitals to support direct patient care every year. Through Ontario Health, several screening programs are available with the goal of finding cancer earlier, leading to better health outcomes for patients.

Ontario's cancer screening programs detect pre-cancerous changes or cancer at an early stage when there is a better chance of treating it successfully. Screening is for people who do not have any cancer symptoms, and I certainly encourage Ontarians to speak to their physicians or any primary care provider to discuss their care plan.

Ontario Health oversees Ontario's overall cancer strategy, including critical programs and services such as:

—cancer surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy;

—Ontario's cancer screening programs, such as the Ontario breast cancer screening program, ColonCancer-Check, Ontario cervical cancer screening program and the Ontario lung cancer screening program;

—the Ontario Renal Network, which manages dialysis services for the province; and

—tracking performance to ensure constant improvements in cancer, chronic kidney disease and access to care.

Speaker, I'm proud to say that, given the success of Ontario's cancer strategy, cancer incidence rates have been stable since 2001 and mortality has been declining since 1983. But of course, there is still more to be done.

Cancer screening and associated diagnostic services are delivered in Ontario through primary care, through hospitals, independent health facilities and other health care providers practising outside of hospitals, like community-based colonoscopists—have to get the emphasis on the right syllable with that one.

Last month, our government introduced Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care. The plan focuses on providing people with a better health care experience by connecting them to more convenient care options close to home while shortening wait times for key services across the province and growing the health care workforce for years to come.

One of the key initiatives includes expanding access to integrated community health services centres, where cancer screening and associated diagnostic services are delivered in Ontario. We are increasing access to surgeries and procedures, such as MRIs and CT scans, cataract surgeries, orthopedics, colonoscopies and endoscopies.

**1720**

In addition to shortening wait times, providing these publicly funded services through community surgical and diagnostic centres will allow hospitals to focus their efforts and resources on more complex and high-risk surgeries. We're also investing more than \$18 million in existing centres to cover care for thousands of patients, including more than 49,000 hours of MRI and CT scans, 4,800 more cataract surgeries, 900 other ophthalmological surgeries, 1,000 minimally-invasive gynecological surgeries and 2,845 plastic surgeries.

For over 30 years, community surgical and diagnostic centres have been partners in Ontario's health care system. Like hospitals, community surgical diagnostic centres are held accountable to the highest quality standards, the standards that Ontarians deserve and expect across the health care system. To further support integration, quality and funding accountability, oversight of community surgical centres will transition to Ontario Health. This improved integration into our broader health care system will allow Ontario Health to continue to track available community surgical capacity, assess regional needs and respond more quickly across the province and within the regions where there are gaps and patient need exists. Our government is clear: Ontarians will continue to use their OHIP card and never their credit card.

Based on clinical guidelines established by the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care—which the member referenced—currently the province, through OHIP, funds the prostate-specific antigen, or PSA, test for

men under these circumstances: men who are receiving treatment for prostate cancer; men who are being followed after treatment for prostate cancer; and, finally, men who are suspected of having prostate cancer because of a family history—like Anthony—and/or the results of a physical exam with their provider. I should note that Ontario's policy in this area is akin to that of British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick and Quebec. Prince Edward Island only covers PSA testing as a screening tool after the age of 50, but patients must still speak with a health care provider about tests.

Most international and national guidelines and recommendations—including those by the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care, the United States Preventive Services Task Force, and the American College of Physicians—recommend against screening for prostate cancer using the PSA test due to the lack of evidence to suggest a universal benefit to screening. Should these recommendations from the experts be updated, Ontario will, of course, review eligibility in consultations with our clinical partners at Ontario Health. Ontarians who are concerned about their risk of prostate cancer—and Anthony probably talks to many people who would fall in that category—should reach out to their primary care provider about test eligibility and have that discussion with them.

Our government also supports cancer care through the Ontario Public Drug Programs; approximately \$1.7 billion was invested last year in cancer drug expenditures. I would like to highlight in this House that take-home cancer drugs are funded through the Ontario Drug Benefit Program and make up about 58% of the Ministry of Health's total expenditure for cancer drugs.

All of these services are priorities highlighted in our Ontario Cancer Plan 5, a strategic five-year guide for improving the cancer system in Ontario that was launched by our government, with the support of Ontario Health, in 2019. The scope of the work in this plan includes all stages of the cancer care treatment journey from diagnosis through to recovery.

I'd like to close by thanking the member for bringing forward this important motion—it's important to talk about prostate cancer and raise awareness, as Anthony Henry is doing in his community; certainly, it's good for all of us to raise awareness about it in ours—and giving me the opportunity to speak about some of the investments the government is making in the cancer system and the reason for our decisions. As always, Ontarians who are concerned about their risk of prostate cancer or any other cancer should speak with their primary care provider. Ontarians can also connect to Health811, formerly Health Care Connect, to find available primary care services in their area.

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

**MPP Jill Andrew:** Just before I started, I want to express to anyone watching or to those who aren't familiar with the government's Bill 60, the profitization and privatization of health care, which the member from Eglinton-Lawrence spoke so proudly of: Make no mistake, the excess service that this bill claims to provide Ontarians is only provided to those who have the pockets, the money, the finances to purchase. It's very, very problematic when

procedures that should be covered and are covered by your OHIP are all of a sudden being covered by credit cards, courtesy of Bill 60. I just wanted to clear that up so that folks got the reality check of what Bill 60 is.

Anyone with a prostate can get prostate cancer, and this includes cisgender men, trans women and nonbinary people. I wholeheartedly support this motion, and I'm calling on the Ford government to follow the lead of eight other provinces and fully cover the prostate-specific antigen PSA test under OHIP when prescribed by a doctor.

I must also note that this motion, put forth by our outstanding member from Niagara Falls, is a fiscally responsible piece of legislation that calls for investing now to help save lives, as opposed to not covering the PSA test, which has been known to act as a deterrent for those who may have limited financial means. A cost for diagnostic tests will deter people from seeking answers early, and with prostate cancer, early detection is key. If prostate cancer is left undiagnosed and unchecked, the cost to our health care system would be tenfold. As the saying goes, prevention is better—or, I might add, cheaper—than the cure.

The cost of a test should never be a prohibitive factor, especially for groups in society who have felt the disproportionate impact of health inequities. This is especially true for many Black men, who are disproportionately impacted by prostate cancer. Black men, as we have heard, have almost double the risk of developing prostate cancer compared to non-Black men. They're also more likely to have prostate tumours that grow and spread quickly. Black men are also more likely to die from prostate cancer compared to other men.

I want to read into the Hansard a quote from Mr. Ken Noel, the president of the Walnut Foundation: "Prostate cancer disproportionately impacts Black men in this province, according to a recent study co-authored by the Walnut Foundation and published in the Canadian Medical Association open journal. The Walnut Foundation, a prostate cancer awareness and support non-profit organization targeting the Black community, encourages Black men to be more involved in their personal health, get the facts, 'know your numbers' and that 'early detection saves lives.' However, men are thwarted by having to pay for a simple blood test in Ontario. We need to minimize barriers to early diagnosis and getting the PSA test funded by OHIP will improve outcomes for those most impacted by this disease. Remember Black men are 76% more likely to be diagnosed and 2.2 times more likely to die from prostate cancer."

The name of that study, and I would encourage everyone to read it—it is a study that was led by Dr. Aisha Lofters. It is titled Prostate Cancer Incidence among Immigrant Men in Ontario, Canada: A Population-Based Retrospective Cohort Study.

I of course also want to give a shout-out to Mr. Henry as well. Thank you for your leadership and your advocacy—and your research, at that.

The Walnut Foundation's annual Walk the Path Walkathon to help raise awareness about prostate cancer is taking place on June 3 this year. I also want to give a shout-out to Ivan Dawns, who has been named the honorary

campaign chairperson of this year's walk. Ivan Dawns is the first Black union representative with the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, and recently received the Ontario Black History Society Dr. Anderson Abbott Award for his leadership and advocacy. Dr. Abbott, born in 1837 in Toronto, Upper Canada, was Canada's first Canadian-born Black person to be licensed as a doctor.

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The Ontario NDP has long called for the collection of race-based socio-demographic data in health to prevent worse health outcomes for racialized Ontarians. If we see where the disparities are, we can address health inequities through a full systems approach. According to the Black Health Alliance, "Although there are some conditions that are inherited at greater rates in some ethnic groups, such as sickle cell disease"—which we've also raised legislation for in this House—"the majority of chronic illnesses have many different contributing factors including—social determinants of health such as access to health care, support networks, education and stress."

Lastly, "One ongoing stressor is anti-Black racism, which we believe is a major contributing factor to many of the disparities in health that Black people experience." Experiencing everyday systemic and even internalized racism intersecting with class or socio-economic barriers and disparities, according to evidence-based research, has been shown to worsen illness and health outcomes for many within Black, Indigenous and racialized communities.

I couldn't support the member for Niagara Falls' legislation more, and I hope that this government passes it and saves lives.

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

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** I'm pleased to rise this afternoon in support of the bill by the member for Niagara Falls. I would like to say at the outset that I cannot imagine a better champion for this cause, because the member unquestionably has a moustache for Movember.

But prostate cancer is not a joke. It's a really big deal. It is the fourth most common cause of cancer in Canada, and it impacts one in nine men. It kills men, and it cannot be ignored.

I'll touch briefly on the risk factors because I will come back to them momentarily. Those risk factors include increased age, certain ethnicities like African Americans or people from Black communities, smoking and family history.

In the vast majority of cases, prostate cancer is asymptomatic. Less commonly, men may present with lower urinary tract symptoms—difficulty urinating, blood in their urine—and sometimes it is discovered when, sadly, the cancer is already metastatic; in other words, it has already spread.

This debate is important just for the very fact that it raises awareness about prostate cancer. This discussion is really important, and it is really important that all men have a discussion with their doctor about prostate cancer and their individual risk. So I'm glad that we're talking about this today.

Now, at the risk of being a little bit too graphic, I will touch on a little bit about how we detect prostate cancer,

because ultimately, the decisions that we make will be consequences that men across this province have to face. In order to detect prostate cancer before it develops symptoms, there are two ways: a digital rectal exam which involves a physician taking a gloved finger and inserting it into a man's rectum to palpate their prostate; the other way is a blood test.

Now, I do want to be clear. There is what we call equipoise and a divergence of opinion about how to screen and test for prostate cancer. The reason is that there isn't a perfect screening test. In fact, there rarely is a perfect screening test for anything. There are what we call false positives with the PSA test—that is, the blood test. There are also false negatives with the rectal exam. But it is largely accepted that men should have a discussion with their health care provider about their individual risk for prostate cancer and decide together, based on their individual risk and their risk tolerance, about whether they should get a test.

In my own clinical practice, when I've had that discussion with male patients, many men have decided that it is the right thing for them to do to get screened for prostate cancer. I know that plays out in clinics across our province. But health care is more difficult to access: Fewer people have access to a trusted family doctor, and those that do may have difficulty seeing them in person. So for those who even have an appetite for getting tested with a digital rectal exam, it may not be possible at all. The PSA test may, by default, be their only option.

Certain marginalized populations are especially vulnerable and have a decreased ability to be able to pay for that test. I mentioned the risk factors for prostate cancer: men who are either from Black communities or African American, who are disproportionately represented in less affluent communities, are the ones who are more likely to have prostate cancer and less likely to be able to afford the test. In my work with Indigenous communities—another community that is going to be less likely to be able to pay for a test—I've treated patients who were sodomized. Again, forgive me for being graphic, but they were sodomized. A digital rectal exam is a no-go for those individuals and it would have to be a PSA test.

And so I want to reiterate that we don't have a perfect test for screening for prostate cancer. We rarely have perfect screening tests. But men should have the choice, based upon their own values and their risk tolerance, which is in compliance with professional recommendations. They should have the opportunity to discuss with their doctor and seek out screening for prostate cancer if they so choose. For many men the best way to do that, they will decide, is with the PSA test. It should be covered so that they can get the care they need.

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

**Mr. Chris Glover:** I really want to thank the member from Niagara Falls for bringing forward this motion. I want to thank Anthony Henry for your advocacy and for being here, and the Canadian Cancer Society. Today, the motion from the member for Niagara Falls is to ask that OHIP cover PSA testing, which is a prostate screening test, in all cases, because right now some men, when they go to get a

PSA blood test to see if they've got prostate cancer, have to pay for it, and that's absolutely inexcusable.

I was listening to the deputy to the Minister of Health's comments earlier in regard to this motion. She recited this line that the government always recites: "You're going to pay for your health care with your OHIP card, not your credit card." And yet, the very motion that she was speaking about is a case where Ontarian men have to pay for their health care with their credit card and can't pay for it with their OHIP card. If you actually pass this motion today and make it into law, then Ontarians won't have to pay for PSA testing with their credit card; they will be able to pay for it with their OHIP card. I just can't believe that the deputy to the minister actually recited that line in the context of this motion that we've got here.

The other thing about this is that prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among men: One in eight men in Canada will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime. It disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous and people of colour, and there are higher rates of prostate cancer among men of African and Caribbean ancestry. There is racial inequality in access to health care in this country, that's something that we have to acknowledge. This motion today would actually help to address some of that racial inequality in access to health care.

Right now, OHIP pays for a PSA test—this is a prostate-specific antigen test; it measures to see if those antigens are in your blood, which could indicate that you've got prostate cancer—only if your physician suspects prostate cancer, if you've been diagnosed or if you are being treated for prostate cancer. Well, this is too late. The idea of cancer screening is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. You want early detection of cancer.

That's what this motion is about. It's about making sure that everybody, regardless of their ability to pay, can access a PSA test, so that they can get the earliest detection of prostate cancer and have the likely best health outcomes. So I don't know why it sounded like, from the deputy to the minister, the government is not going to be supporting this motion. I think that's really shameful. It just shows that when the government says you're going to pay for your health care with your OHIP card, not your credit card, you're not telling the truth, because this is a case right here where you have the chance to fix—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member made an unparliamentary remark that he has to withdraw.

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**Mr. Chris Glover:** I'll withdraw.

This is a case right here where Ontarians are being asked to pay for their health care with their credit card, and the government could change that by passing this motion today.

Thank you to the member from Niagara Falls. Thank you to Anthony. Thank you to the Canadian Cancer Society for being here to support this motion today.

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

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** I would also like to start by thanking the member for Niagara for bringing this motion

forward and the Canadian Cancer Society and those who have been active on this issue.

Speaker, many people have talked about cost and cost savings, and those are all legitimate concerns that should be taken into account. But I want to say that if my colleague's motion results in a reduction in the number of people who show up in the radiation treatment waiting room at Princess Margaret hospital, if my colleague's motion results in a reduction in the number of people who spend time in chemotherapy rooms in hospitals in Kingston, Ottawa, London, Windsor, Timmins, then that motion will have saved quite a few lives and served the people of this province well.

All of us, through our families and our networks of friends, know people who have suffered with cancer and, unfortunately, died of cancer. We've been to the funerals. We've seen people wither. We know that, in this society, even \$35 or \$50, which is not a huge amount if you're an MPP, is a substantial chunk of cash, and when it comes to a question of giving people a chance at surviving a cancer that can be quite effective when not caught early, I don't quite understand why there needs to be a debate, quite honestly.

I think the member for Niagara put it quite powerfully: We have to look after ourselves, our brothers and our sisters. We don't want to put them through this. We don't want to spend time with them in palliative care because we don't want them to be there because of this. I urge the government to support this motion. Thank you.

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

The member for Niagara Falls has two minutes to reply.

**Mr. Wayne Gates:** Thank you very much, and I want to thank my colleagues, at least most of them, who spoke. I'd like to thank the Canadian Cancer Society for being here and Anthony.

I'm going to go over the stats again because obviously somebody is missing a message here. In 2022, last year, 1,800 people were projected to die from prostate cancer. That means five men—I'm looking at my brothers who are in this room—five men are going to die today. One in eight will be diagnosed with prostate cancer, 10,000 in Ontario last year. If you're diagnosed early, 100%—100%—will live at least five years or longer, but if you're diagnosed at stage 4 or later, guess what happens? That goes down to 29%; 29%—they're going to die. That's our dads, our brothers. They don't need to die.

We know some people can't afford to get the test. That's what this is about. I'm saying to you, guys—I'm begging you. I've done this three or four times now. There's no need for men to die. If you have a prostate, you can get prostate cancer and you can die.

I'm going to give you a quick example. I know I've only got 30 seconds left. I'm going to talk about Larry Gibson. He owns the Fort Erie Golf Club, a small golf course in Fort Erie. He was 48 years old. He went to the doctor; he got the test done. He could afford to pay for it. You know what? He had prostate cancer. He's alive today. I think he's 67 years old. He gets to enjoy his family. He's getting to enjoy his grandkids. The smile on Larry's face every day, how he enjoys life because he's still here—if he didn't get that test, he'd be dead.

How can anybody in this House not support having this covered by OHIP to save men's lives here, to save our dads' lives, to save our grandparents' lives? I'm sorry. I get emotional because I've seen the people that have died from prostate cancer and the suffering they went through.

My time is up. I appreciate you giving me an extra minute.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Mr. Gates has moved private member's notice of motion number 22. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

*Vote deferred.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until Monday, March 6, 2023, at 10:15 a.m.

*The House adjourned at 1746.*







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Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
<b>Skelly, Donna (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)</b>	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)</b>	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	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
<b>Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)</b>	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
<b>Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)</b>	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
<b>Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)</b>	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	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
<b>Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)</b>	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	