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ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, 2024, Bill 171, Ms. Thompson / Loi de 2024 sur l'amélioration des soins professionnels prodigués aux animaux, projet de loi 171, Mme Thompson

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 20 March 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 20 mars 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL CARE
FOR ANIMALS ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION
DES SOINS PROFESSIONNELS
PRODIGUÉS AUX ANIMAUX

Ms. Thompson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act to enact the Veterinarian Professionals Act, 2024 and amend or repeal various acts / Projet de loi 171, Loi visant à édicter la Loi de 2024 sur les professionnels vétérinaires et à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to the second reading of Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, 2024. I'll be sharing my time with my esteemed parliamentary assistant, the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington.

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, absolutely.

Before I begin, though, there are a number of people that I would like to thank for the role they played in getting us to where we are today. First of all, thank you to my parliamentary assistant, the MPP for Chatham-Kent-Leamington. His support through this process was unwavering and he has worked incredibly hard—double duty, if you will—in making sure everything flows really well. I just appreciate his spirit and everything he does.

I'd also like to recognize the now Associate Minister of Housing. When he served as my parliamentary assistant last year, he led a large part of the consultations on this bill, and he played a significant role in making sure that we landed in the right place to be able to bring this forward today.

I also want to thank all the stakeholders who have worked so incredibly well with us through this process, including the College of Veterinarians, the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association, the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians, and there are so many others.

You know, whenever you bring a substantial bill forward, the meetings and the discussions are so, so important because, again, everyone has their opinions and the direction that they would like to seek. But at the end of the day, once we made our way through all the important discussions, we found a landing spot where, I'm so incredibly pleased, everyone supports.

I think a testimony to that and the work that everyone has done happened just a few weeks ago. I think the date was March 7, when the gallery was full of stakeholders here to see the tabling of this important piece of legislation. Over 20 associations alone attended the introduction to support Bill 171. Again, their commitment to seeing this through is so very appreciated. We're better because of their involvement as well.

Dr. Wade Wright, president of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario, said, when we tabled the bill on March 7, "Today is a pinnacle moment, a significant step toward a robust and effective legislative framework to govern veterinary medicine in Ontario."

Doug Brooks, president and CEO of the Ontario SPCA and Humane Society, said, "This is an important step to increase access to veterinary care in Ontario and we look forward to working with the province to further ensure all animals can get the care they need."

Bill 171 represents the ideas and suggestions we heard from both the public as well as stakeholders. But all of the ideas in the world wouldn't do any good without people who can turn those ideas into legislation. I wouldn't be standing here talking about this bill today without the dedication and amazing commitment of team OMAFRA.

Not only does my direct team in the minister's office deserve a shout-out—they've been phenomenal, shepherding this piece of legislation to where we are today—but I also would like to recognize David Hagarty, assistant deputy minister for the policy division; Andrea Martin, director of the food safety and environmental policy branch, and her team, Robert Blenkinsop, Michael Richardson, William Martin and Vicky Grahovac; and also the OMAFRA legal team: Shannon DeLeskie, Mark Schofield and Rushda Munshi. Honest to goodness, this was an effort that required heavy lifting by all of our team members.

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Absolutely. Thank you for that, Robin. Yes.

We worked diligently right through to the eleventh hour. I really, really appreciate the work that we received and the desire to make sure we got it right in a short turnaround time. I really think that we're stronger because of their commitment to getting this done.

I want to start by sharing a reflection with all of you. Bill 171, the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, would repeal the Veterinarians Act and replace it with the Veterinary Professionals Act. The Veterinarians Act was introduced in 1989 and—

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: That's the year I was born.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: The year you were born? Okay. So I won't say it's old. But with that said—

Interjection.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, I love that. Actually, Deirdre was born in 1989, too, when I think about it.

I have to tell you, this legislation is 35 years old, and it has served Ontario animals and animal owners well. The reflection I want to share with you is that it was actually introduced by a predecessor of mine, Jack Riddell, whom we recently paid tribute to in this House. It was a much-needed step forward at the time. I look upon Bill 171 as building on the great foundation that Jack Riddell built. Essentially, one Huron county MPP picks up where the other one left off, so that is pretty cool too, in and of itself.

Jack not only was the Minister of Agriculture and Food, but he represented our riding so incredibly well. At the time, he represented both Huron county and Huron–Middlesex. Today, I'm proudly in front of you representing both Huron and Bruce counties. Jack had an amazing tie and connection to the agricultural community throughout all of Ontario.

In introducing this bill, I believe that it's a tribute to the amazing work that Jack started and we're continuing to modernize. I think he would be pleased that another person who calls Huron county home is picking up and getting it right. Because we need to make sure that not only animals across Ontario but our professionals have the right supports in place, and that's all defined through legislation.

Our government recognizes that animals play such an important part in our world, from cats to dogs to unique household pets through to livestock in our barn. We all do our very best to make sure that they're well cared for. I think it's important to share that not only do we need to think about our companion pets, but we need to think about what it means to have the responsibility of caring for both pets and livestock.

0910

We know animals serve society in more formal roles. Service dogs are trained to assist many people who are visually impaired. They are also being trained to help in other ways, like alerting owners to an imminent epileptic seizure, or just a calming feature for people who need that outlet to relieve their stress. From police horses to Canada Border Services Agency dogs, we also rely on animals to protect our society. Finally, we need to recognize that a good source of protein is realized through livestock as well. According to Stats Canada, in 2021, there were more than 20,000 livestock farms in Ontario. Farmers take good care of their animals, and they take pride in that. This bill is intended to help them do that as well.

Drew Spoelstra is the new president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and he has hit the ground running.

I appreciated his comments on this particular bill, and I'm going to quote him: "Veterinarians play a critical role, promoting the health and welfare of animals and maintaining a healthy, safe and sustainable agri-food system. These proposed changes to modernize and streamline the act will ensure Ontario farmers have access to modern and quality care for their livestock, a crucial component to the economic stability of Ontario's rural communities." That is so true.

Honest to goodness, when we take a look at the overall landscape, all animals need access to veterinary care, regardless of whether they are pets, service animals, working animals or livestock. Even wild animals sometimes depend on veterinary care if they are injured and are taken to a wildlife sanctuary.

So much was harvested, if you will, through the consultations that Associate Minister Flack facilitated on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Knowing that access to veterinary care has long been a challenge, especially in rural and northern Ontario, we began to look at how the Veterinarians Act could be modernized to address that. We reached out to stakeholders and the public to hear their suggestions and ideas about how to increase access to veterinary care.

Just as we developed the Grow Ontario Strategy, things were happening in tandem. Some of you may recall that we have three main pillars in our Grow Ontario Strategy: a safe and secure supply chain; a commitment to research and innovation; as well as attracting the very best talent, and veterinarians are part of that as well. We made a commitment to listen to stakeholders in that spirit and take time to consider their feedback carefully.

In November 2022, my ministry launched a pre-consultation for the public to submit ideas to modernize the Veterinarians Act through a dedicated web page. A more detailed discussion paper based on consultations and research done by the College of Veterinarians of Ontario and a proposal to modernize the Veterinarians Act—all of that information was posted on the regulatory registry on March 1, 2023, for three months.

That particular proposal that was posted on the regulatory registry stated, "The goal of this modernization is to better define the scope of practice for veterinary medicine, improve transparency and align oversight of Ontario's veterinary profession with other self-governing regulated professions in the province, to uphold the public interest. By modernizing the act, the government is laying the groundwork to increase the availability of veterinarian services for both pets and large animals."

Between the posting and the web page, our ministry received nearly 300 submissions from veterinarians, vet techs, agricultural groups, animal welfare groups and individual citizens. In April and May 2023, OMAFRA staff also provided information about the proposal during four public webinars. Alongside these sessions, former parliamentary assistant Flack hosted several round table discussions across the table. The round tables were held in St. Thomas, Barrie, Lindsay, Huntsville, Pembroke, Thunder Bay and Toronto. I want to thank my colleagues who

co-hosted these round tables, which included agricultural groups, local humane societies, veterinarians and other interested individuals.

I again want to commend the Associate Minister of Housing for the work that he did on this, and I expect he will speak to this bill and share with members of this House more about what he heard from the over 120 people who attended the round tables and webinars.

The majority of these submissions supported the proposed modernization of the Veterinarians Act and the proposals outlined in the discussion document. There was also a strong interest among stakeholders in ensuring a modernized legislative framework so it could better serve the needs of veterinarians, the public and our agricultural industry—not just for today but for years to come.

Now, in the spirit of modernizing the legislative framework, I also want to reflect and talk about our veterinary technicians. After a year and a half of consultation with stakeholders and partners, I'm so very pleased to bring forward proposed changes to the legislative framework for veterinarians and veterinary professionals to better reflect how veterinary medicine is delivered today.

Our proposed legislation will, if passed, recognize the important role that veterinary technicians play in delivering care to animals. Over the past 35 years, delivery of veterinary care has become a team endeavour—I can't stress that enough; veterinary care is really, truly facilitated by a team in our communities—however, vet techs are not recognized in the current Veterinarians Act. This new, modernized act will, if passed, regulate both veterinarians and veterinary technicians, reflecting a “one profession, two professionals” approach to the delivery of veterinary medicine in Ontario.

In order to reflect that change, the College of Veterinarians of Ontario will be renamed the College of Veterinary Professionals of Ontario. The renamed college will create regulations, subject to the government's approval, that will outline the scope of practice for veterinary technicians. It is our expectation in government that the regulations will define a broad scope of practice that is in line with the skills and training registered vet techs possess.

I think it's really important to share with you that I was honoured to speak at the registered vet techs conference in Hamilton just a couple of weeks ago. In doing so, the magnitude of what we're doing by enabling a scope of practice for registered vet techs really hit me. Honest to goodness, Speaker, people were in tears when they heard that we were moving forward to recognize their training and their expertise. I know that this has been asked for for a long time. It's our government that is proudly getting it done on their behalf.

Why does this matter? Well, we all know, especially in rural and northern Ontario, we have a shortage of veterinarians. By recognizing the scope of practice for registered vet techs, there's going to be increased access to care in the spirit of that team approach that I just referenced. And I know when I travelled to Thunder Bay about 18 months ago or so and visited a vet clinic, the veterinarian and his techs alike really were truly advocating for a modern-

ization of the act so that he could extend his services through the expertise and training of his amazing team of vet techs. That was a really good visit and drove home for me that we were indeed on the right track to get this done.

For those who aren't aware, the vet tech program is a two-year diploma program offered at a variety of institutions across this province. I think it's amazing because, again, it's so important that students, if they so choose, can learn at home. When they learn at home, chances are, in rural Ontario, they stay close to home as well. There are two-year programs offered at Algonquin College, Collège Boréal—en français—Georgian College, Northern College, Seneca College, Sheridan College, St. Clair College, St. Lawrence College and, as well, at the University of Guelph's Ridgetown campus.

Each college describes their program a little differently. The following is the Northern College's description of their vet tech program based in Haileybury, in Temiskaming Shores:

“Students learn to perform basic patient examination, collect data on vital signs, administer medications and prepare pharmaceuticals as prescribed by a veterinarian. They will explore anaesthesia, animal nursing, surgical assistance, dental prophylactic procedures, diagnostic laboratory work and tests, such as blood chemistries, culture and sensitivity, and electrocardiograms. This program covers veterinary practice management skills including computer applications, recognizing behavioural signs of small animals and educating and counselling clients in the area of pet nutrition.”

0920

These programs are all accredited by the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians. Graduates of these programs are well trained to perform a number of veterinary services. The intent of this legislation is that vets will now be able to use the skills of vet techs to their fullest potential. That is amazing news.

I have also met with a number of vet techs over the past year or so, as I mentioned. The conference in Hamilton was amazing. There were 1,200 registered vet techs in attendance. The trade show was incredible, and the spirit and the commitment were palpable. You could tell registered vet techs are very proud of their position and what they do in the spirit of animal care.

While that was before Bill 171 was introduced, the association was aware of the consultations. All of the registered vet techs who were able to exercise their voice, I can tell you with certainty, were very excited about future opportunities in this profession based on how we're moving forward with Bill 171.

Vet tech students are also excited about the future because, again, they have the potential of having their full scope of practice recognized and valued. I was pleased to be joined by two Seneca College students, Elizabeth Crouchman and Joner Kuo, for the introduction of this bill.

I want to talk about other non-veterinary animal service providers as well, because we need to also recognize that there are important animal care services that are currently being performed by qualified and competent non-veterin-

ary practitioners. The proposal acknowledges that there is a role for non-veterinarian animal health practitioners in the delivery of services respecting animal care. We have had an approach which continues access that I think reflects the fulsome picture of animal care, all the while protecting health and well-being.

I have to say, when pet owners know their pets—and/or farmers with their livestock—are stressed and not well, it can create a situation whereby there's a lot of anxiety. So this new act would enable regulations to be made in consultation with the stakeholders that could formalize exemptions for non-veterinarian practitioners and help ensure that the public and these animal care providers will be qualified and competent to provide safe care. Because again, that's what we do on farm; we work diligently to make sure our animals are healthy and safe and relaxed, just like pet owners. The regulations that would be set out in the terms and limitations, guidelines and prohibitions in this legislation will set out how these professionals can safely continue to provide care to animals.

I think it's important to recognize that this also applies to pharmacists. They would be able to compound, dispense and sell medication that an animal owner has a prescription for. This would also enable the ability, through regulation, to clarify that people can request a copy of their prescription if they would like to get it filled by another provider.

Similar to when you visit the eye doctor, you have a choice of whether you purchase glasses through them or you take your prescription to go to another store. That's the perfect analogy that speaks to what we're enabling here. It's about access to care and choice.

Another concern, though, that was raised during consultation was access to ultrasounds for pregnant animals, in particular, small ruminants such as sheep and goats. Albeit we've had a herd dispersal in the fall of 2023, we still have six does, and we really could have used a few preg-checks because, honest to goodness, the last three weeks have seen six goats that we kept produce 18 kids, and that's a lot. That is a lot: two sets of quads, two sets of triplets and two sets of twins. Honest to goodness, I want to give a—actually, I have to do this. I have to give a shout-out to my brother and sister-in-law, who have adopted our goats while my husband recovers. They have been busy. Oh my goodness.

Interjections.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you for that.

You know, when the first set of quads arrived, it was like, "Oh my gosh, she did it all herself." Just on Sunday, we had our last doe kid-out and she had quads. Unfortunately, she's a younger goat, and she's like, "What are these four things hanging around me?" So we have—the collective we, meaning my brother and sister-in-law—had to be very hands-on. I want to give a shout-out to Al and Teresa for taking that extra care to make sure those four little kids are getting the nutrition they need at a pivotal time.

But a preg-check could—if we were able and had access to the technology, a preg-check would have come

in really handy because we would have known what we were going to be experiencing this spring.

Larger herds and bigger farmers actually really benefit from the low-risk preg-checks that can be facilitated, and we need to make sure that that continues, both for sheep farmers and goat farmers, and I also heard from pork producers as well that they need to be continuing to—how do I say this? Pork producers also want to be able to continue the practice of preg-checks in their facilities as well, because it could get very costly.

With low margins and the cost of farming going nowhere but up based on added expenses and the bad policy that we're seeing from the federal government—I'd be remiss if I didn't have a second pause and say that margins are tight on farms, and we need to be doing everything we can to help farmers succeed, as opposed to what we see coming from the federal Liberal government right now. I wish the provincial Liberals would stand up to them and say, "Look, we need to make sure that we're enabling our farmers to be the very best they can be, as opposed to weighing down their shoulders with heavy carbon tax implications." April 1 is just around the corner. It's happening next week. When costs of production continue to skyrocket because of this ill-advised policy, it's important that we do everything we can here provincially to let them know that we are proud of our farmers and we're trying to reduce burden and reduce the cost of production for them, to offset what little we can because of the bad policies coming from the federal level.

To get back to the subject at hand, if this bill is passed, it would ensure that ultrasound technicians that provide pregnancy checks for small ruminants will continue to be able to do so.

This bill also continues a number of key exemptions that exist in the current Veterinarians Act, such as the ability for farmers, their families and employees to continue to provide care for their animals. This would include continuing the exemption for farmers who have taken the courses to perform preg-checks on their own animals. That's really important.

This bill also does not propose to regulate lower-risk services such as grooming, hoof trimming or massage. I have to give a shout-out to Ezra. Thank you for coming out on Saturday morning to trim the hooves of our does. We really appreciated that. It's important. Husbandry matters, and we need to be able to access those people who have those skills.

Rural Ontario has a plethora of talented people who care for animals, and we need to do everything we can, again, to embrace that team approach, recognizing how important our veterinarians are, our registered vet techs, but also that there are other people who provide services to help us be the best we can be in the care of our animals on farm.

Now, as I mentioned, this bill will, if passed, change the name of the regulatory college to the College of Veterinary Professionals of Ontario. It will also add new objects to the college, including working with the minister on access

to adequate numbers of qualified, skilled and competent veterinary professionals.

Our bill also includes a number of improvements that will enable the regulatory college to achieve positive outcomes. These improvements include establishing a more diverse council, enabling mandatory quality assurance programming, streamlining the complaints process—and upholding the public trust in the field of veterinary medicine is paramount. That all sounds very complicated so I'll spell it out for you.

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The council for the renamed College of Veterinary Professionals of Ontario would be expanded to include veterinary technicians, representatives from a vet school and a vet tech program and more members of the public. This will bring more perspectives to the table when decisions are being made. What the legislation calls quality assurance programming breaks down to a few things. The college will be able to create requirements for continuing education for its members, something the college has requested and most other self-regulated professions already require. All these proposed changes would bring the veterinary profession in line with other self-regulated professions across Ontario.

One of the concerns we heard during the consultations was that the complaint resolution process for veterinarians took far too long, on both sides of that equation, if you will. This bill proposes to streamline that process, which will be good for both, as I alluded to, veterinarians as well as animal owners. All in all, stakeholder reaction to the proposed modernization has been very positive. Again, I'm proud of the work that entire team has committed to get it right.

I'd also like to share with everyone that the reality is this community of people who care for our pets and our livestock throughout Ontario have been asking for this modernization for years. Their last big push to address this was in 2017. I'm so very proud to stand in front of you today to demonstrate that our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, had the capacity, had the understanding and had the commitment to listening, consulting, to get it right. It's our government that's getting it done, not only for pet owners and for farmers, but we're getting it done for the professionals who pride themselves in the care that they give in terms of professional care for animals and livestock. Again, building on the legacy of Jack Riddell and the legislation that he introduced 35 years ago, I am very confident that with this legislation and by working with our stakeholders through regulation development, we absolutely will have a foundation for which we can enhance, with confidence, professional care for animals from one end of this province to another.

Madam Speaker, I'm glad that an incredible amount of time was taken to consider the feedback from all of our stakeholders. People will see themselves in this legislation because we took time to reflect on the common-sense approach to the modernization of this particular act. I'm very proud of the manner in which it's been incorporated into the proposed Veterinary Professionals Act.

Recognizing that there is a team of professionals that come together in the spirit of animal care, does everyone agree? Of course not, but this legislation recognizes the reality that we have across this province here and now. It's in that spirit of collaboration that I invite all of our professions to continue to work together to make sure that we get it right, because at the end of the day, it is about enhancing our animal care, increasing access, giving certainty to people, pet owners and livestock owners alike across this province so that they have access to good veterinary care. And most importantly, there's choice as well, like the example that once you have your prescription, you can go to your pharmacist to fill it if you so choose. Choice matters as well in this instance.

Given the extensive consultations undertaken, we feel confident that we are taking the right steps, with actions that will help strengthen the agriculture and food sector and help us to grow Ontario together. That's the spirit in which our Grow Ontario Strategy was devised and introduced in the fall of 2022. What we're doing here today with Bill 171 fits so well into our overall Grow Ontario Strategy. Modernizing the legislative framework and increasing veterinary capacity are part of our government's Grow Ontario Strategy.

Grow Ontario is our provincial agricultural and food pathway, if you will, and it aims to attract and grow Ontario's agri-food talent. More specifically, these proposed changes would support the government's plan to develop and increase capacity in the agriculture and agri-food sector. Increasing total agri-food sector employment by 10% by 2032 is a key goal of our overall Grow Ontario Strategy. Like these proposed changes, which arose directly from stakeholder consultations, the Grow Ontario Strategy was informed by the insights of industry.

Speaker, I see the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act as one leg of a three-legged stool that supports our government's goal to improve veterinary care throughout Ontario. Another way we are working to address the labour challenge is by making investments to address veterinary shortages in rural and northern communities. Through our Veterinary Incentive Program, we are encouraging up to 100 recently graduated veterinarians to work in large-animal practices. This program will give these new vets up to \$50,000 over five years to work in an underserved area of the province to address critical skill and labour shortages. This program was announced late last year and already we're seeing new veterinarians receiving funding to practise in underserved communities, from Fort Frances to Cobden—and Cobden comes from the great county of Renfrew, which has an MPP proudly representing it, day in and day out.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: He's Yak-tastic.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, Yak-tastic, as my colleague said. Also, I have to share that that access to underserved communities is going to be incredibly well received, from Sturgeon Falls to Markdale, which is represented by our amazing member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

We have also announced that we are investing up to \$14.7 million in the creation of veterinary medicine seats,

which will result in 20 additional veterinarians graduating each year. All of these actions, together with the proposed Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, will help us to care for our animals, whether they be pets, service animals or livestock.

At the end of the day, this is making sure that people who choose to be pet owners or people who proudly farm and have livestock that they care for have the supports needed, because animals play such an important role. We've got a 75-pound lap dog. I don't know how that happened; my husband will blame me. But we would do anything for her. And even, begrudgingly, my husband would do anything for our barn cats. Our livestock, our purebred Boer goats matter as well, because we are raising our goats in spirit of having the very best genetics in the province of Ontario that other people can benefit from. Those six goats that we kept are working very hard to make sure that we are coming back and increasing our herd in rapid style, much to our chagrin in some cases. We like twins. We're good with twins, but these triplets and quads blow my mind. I'm always busy on the weekends when I get home to be hands-on.

I also want to share that we're sincere in the manner in which we are coming forward with this piece of legislation. Bill 171 represents a cumulative effort to make sure we're getting it right in the spirit of modernization. Getting it right means that there needs to be compromise and that there needs to be the opportunity to understand the importance of working together in the spirit of making sure that, together, in the spirit of a team, we are enabling Ontarians to access the care that they choose, when and where they need it.

Again, our government is getting it done. When you combine the modernization of the Veterinarians Act with the proposed legislation that we're talking about today, with the fact that we've made a significant investment—up to \$50,000 over five years—to incent veterinarians to go into practice to care for large animals, particularly in northern and rural remote areas that are underserved, and you combine that with the additional 20 seats that MCU has worked with finance and OMAFRA on, our government is taking bold steps that haven't been taken for decades.

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Again, this legislation hasn't been looked at for 35 years, and we need to modernize. I think about our veterinarian at home, Clayton. When I reached out to him to get his perspective on this legislation that we're bringing forward, he was excited. He said, "I don't think many veterinarians in this county have had a Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs reach out to see how they felt about a piece of legislation." That's the difference between our government and governments of the past. We care enough to take the time to listen.

With that, I look forward to passing the floor over to my esteemed colleague from Chatham-Kent–Leamington. I hope you'll listen to what he has to share, because he has played a pivotal role in the process of bringing this legislation to the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I'm so pleased to follow my honourable colleague the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, to share more insights about the proposed Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, 2024. I'd like to begin by recognizing the work that the minister has done on this important file and for her leadership in guiding us along the road to where we are today. She's very quick to provide a lot of insight and a lot of acknowledgement in others, and she's very humble, but her leadership has truly shepherded this bill to where it is today.

On a personal note, I'd like to also recognize the caring, professional team at the Leamington Veterinary Clinic, which is where my family has taken our beloved dog, Caesar, for over 13 years of exemplary care.

Thank you to Dr. Dana Korpasova and her team, and all veterinary clinics across Ontario, for the work you do to keep our beloved pets and our farm animals healthy and safe. You are truly invaluable in our communities and integral to our families. You're critical points of contact, care, important resources, and friends. You're helping inform us and guide us on where our legislation needs to go in the future.

Veterinary medicine has been regulated as a profession in Ontario since 1877, for 147 years now. Access to veterinary care that is regulated and overseen in the public interest is important to everyone.

In 2020, it was estimated that 58% of Canadian households owned at least one dog or cat—a figure believed to have risen over the past few years.

Veterinary care is also important to our food supply chain. In order to raise healthy animals, livestock and poultry, Ontario's producers need access to comprehensive vet care for their animals.

Veterinarians and veterinary technicians also serve as important public health care components to prevent the spread of serious diseases, such as rabies, and for food safety.

As the minister noted in her remarks, the Veterinarians Act was last updated in 1989, 35 years ago. As we can appreciate, so much has changed since that time, particularly with developments in technology. Technological advances have certainly transformed many practices and approaches to care. Vet care is increasingly being provided by a team of qualified professionals, including both veterinarians and veterinary technicians.

Vet technicians have specialized education, training and experience in animal care that are vital to the care team in many veterinary settings. While registered veterinary technicians have an association that advocates on their behalf—the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians—the current legislative framework under the vet act does not formally recognize the role RVTs play in animal care.

I feel very fortunate that my community hosts the exceptional Ridgetown campus of the University of Guelph, which has long been one of the most highly regarded vet

tech schools in Ontario and an important partner in my community of Chatham-Kent-Leamington. I'm very grateful to the faculty, staff and students at Ridgeway campus who have welcomed me into their classrooms to meet with, speak to and learn from everyone there.

The very fact that vet techs aren't recognized by the Veterinarians Act is just one example of how this act no longer reflects modern vet practices. This is precisely why the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is proposing to update the current legislative framework for the vet profession, to open the door to establishing laws that are flexible and modern, and to support a veterinary sector that supports both pet owners and our thriving agriculture industry.

As the minister explained, these proposed changes are designed to improve access to vet care by letting the college define a broader scope of practice for vet techs and to bring veterinary technicians under the same regulatory college and legislation as veterinarians. This proposed legislation would streamline the complaints process, better define the scope of practice for vet medicine and improve transparency. Modernizing the veterinary profession will make it more responsive to public expectations around governance, transparency, oversight and, most importantly, trust.

Like many regulatory bodies in Ontario that oversee a profession, the veterinary regulatory college operates based on a self-regulation system. Members elect peers to serve on the governing council, together with non-licensed individuals appointed by the Ontario government. The principal object of the college is to regulate the practice of veterinary medicine and to govern members in accordance with the act. The regulatory college overseeing veterinary professionals has expressed its alignment to our proposed changes that aim to enhance ministerial oversight of the regulatory college's governing council.

Like any legislation in place for decades, it's imperative to revisit this legislation to ensure it continues to serve its purpose efficiently and effectively. It's crucially important to consider, in these proposed changes, the needs of veterinarians, veterinary technicians, the public, and the agriculture and food industry. The minister described the consultation process very well, but I want to take a moment here to thank the Associate Minister of Housing for his work, the work he did last year to ensure voices from across our province were heard in the development of this important bill. I want to thank everyone who took part in the consultations, whether they submitted comments via email, took part in the virtual meetings or attended one of the regional live round tables—in particular, the stakeholder groups that worked with our ministry throughout this process. Thank you for your time; thank you for your patience. We hopefully are going to get this right together.

Mark Hamel, chair of the Dairy Farmers of Ontario, said, "I think it was a very thorough review and consultation process. I applaud the work that's behind it and the timeliness of getting it to this stage and hopefully passed quickly. Again, it will provide great benefit to our producers and the" broader "agriculture sector."

John Stevens, CEO of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association, shared this view, saying, "We've been very pleased and appreciative of the consultation to date from the ministry and from the minister's office. We've been involved at every step of the way through the public consultations and have felt we've been heard, and we've been going through this process together. "We've been sharing our inputs," and the process undertaken so far has been wonderful.

It's important to note that continued consultations and collaboration are actually built into this new act as the college puts this legislation and any regulations that come from it into practice, should this bill pass. We're striving here to ensure the act can support both individual pet owners and the agriculture industry's current and future needs.

An important aspect of the proposed changes is all about quality assurance, specifically, enabling the regulatory college to develop a formal quality assurance program, which will be overseen by a new statutory committee. This change aims to better ensure continual learning and competence of all members of this important profession.

The proposal mirrors what's currently in place for professional regulatory colleges in human health care. For example, the member from Brantford-Brant must complete continuing education every year as a practising optometrist, and the member from Mississauga Centre participates in continuing education as a registered nurse. As a professional provincial police officer, I had to complete and pass mandatory annual training with specific qualifications. The same is true for accountants, for lawyers, for teachers and many other professions. This is designed to maintain public trust and assurance in the profession, as well as to ensure all active veterinarians and vet techs are up to date with the latest developments in animal care.

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In addition to governance and quality assurance, the proposed changes would include the components dealing with investigations, professional misconduct, a member's fitness to practise and suspected incompetence. The proposed changes would clearly enable a greater amount of information about a licence holder to be collected and, where appropriate, posted on the public-facing register. Again, this is very similar to other regulated professions.

Since regulated professions are specialists, many other people don't have the technical knowledge to judge how well they do their jobs. The ability for the college to post information is intended to allow animal owners to check whether the veterinarian or vet tech they have is a member in good standing using proper protocols and practices, and that they're up to modern standards.

The proposed changes would also bring about mandatory reporting requirements which would require any member who suspects that another member may be unfit to practise due to a health issue or other factor, to report this to the college. There would also be legal protections for members making such reports in good faith. Such a report could be used to bring about an investigation by the

college if the college believes there is a need to examine the matter further or potentially discipline a member.

This bill, if passed, would also increase penalties for actions that could harm an animal, to better reflect the scope of wrongdoing. Fines for taking actions that could foreseeably cause serious harm to an animal without being licensed by the college would be set in legislation and carry serious fines up to: \$25,000 for an individual on first offence and \$50,000 for subsequent offences; \$50,000 for a corporation on the first offence and \$200,000 for subsequent offences. These are serious. Maximum fines for practising veterinary medicine without a licence would increase to the same levels.

Based on feedback received during our consultations, several significant points emerged that informed the proposed modernized legislative framework. Animal owners—including farmers, their family members and employees—need to be able to continue to provide care and treatment for their animals, and veterinarians need the continued ability to delegate tasks in a practice to a competent auxiliary—at their discretion and under supervision, of course. For example, this could be an experienced veterinary assistant at a companion animal hospital who is not a veterinary technician.

Bill 171 is part of a larger strategy to address the need for increased veterinary capacity in Ontario, particularly for farm animals in underserved parts of the province. As the minister mentioned, we have also launched a Veterinary Incentive Program to encourage newly licensed vets to practise in northern and underserved communities and we're investing in an additional 20 seats in veterinary school every year.

The College of Veterinarians of Ontario has worked with our government previously to reduce red tape through recent regulatory amendments which streamlined how vet facilities are accredited in Ontario. These efforts in the recent past have allowed vet practices to provide multiple levels of care to no longer need multiple certificates of accreditation, removing additional paperwork for practice owners. Together with the changes proposed in this bill, the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, we're confident we will be successful in increasing access to vet care for animals across the province.

Madam Speaker, I have appreciated the opportunity to speak today on the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act. To better reflect the current practice of veterinary medicine, Ontario needs modernized legislation that embraces contemporary approaches to professional regulation and governance: in other words, one profession—veterinary medicine—comprised of two professionals—veterinarians and veterinary technicians—serving the public interest.

These proposed changes are part of broader efforts to support success for Ontario's agriculture and food industry, and to streamline and simplify the processes for those doing business in Ontario.

We feel very strongly that these proposed changes will help bring about a veterinary profession that is more responsive to public expectations in governance, transparency and oversight.

We are so pleased that the work done to develop the proposed act has been accomplished through close collaboration with those who are directly impacted by it. We are confident that the process of consultation on modernization of the Veterinarians Act has effectively shaped these proposed changes.

Key to the success of the consultation process on the act was the participation of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario, the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians and the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association as well as the veterinarians and vet techs themselves who took time out of their busy professional lives to participate in the process and the consultation, as well as other animal care providers, humane societies, farmers and pet owners. We're so grateful for their collaboration and for their professionalism in this process. As always, we are committed to listen to stakeholders and to incorporate their insights, and as we continue to do so, we will ensure the proposed changes will better serve everyone in the province over the long-run.

The new legislative framework we propose aims to take a balanced and risk-based approach to the practice of veterinary medicine while continuing to protect animal health and well-being. We are confident these proposed actions will help us keep growing Ontario together.

Thank you for your time today. And on a final note, this process is collaborative, and that is a word to describe listening to stakeholders, to pet owners, to livestock owners, to farmers, veterinarians, vet technicians and that whole circle of continual care. By embracing that wisdom collectively, we think we have a diligent, prudent and comprehensive piece of legislation that can be accepted, can be agreed to; it can bring Ontario into the future, and we hope that we will have collaboration and we'll have success from across the aisle and from everyone in this House to take vet care into the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's always interesting to listen to one-hour leads.

We recently learned of 14 animal deaths at Marineland in my riding of Niagara Falls. There's been a growing concern over the lack of action and transparency from this government when it comes to holding this organization accountable for their actions towards animals and for their safety and care.

So my question is to the government: Will this Conservative government step up and hold Marineland accountable and work towards a day where there are no animals at Marineland anymore?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the member across. Those are serious allegations. We take all animal care very seriously, but the actions of that corporation don't pertain to the bill before the House.

In fact, this legislation is enabling. It empowers veterinary technicians and veterinarians to practise to the full scope of their training and experience.

So although it's very unfortunate and also is a serious concern, it doesn't pertain to the matter at hand. Thank you for your question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the minister and the parliamentary assistant for bringing forth this legislation. It is extremely necessary and going to be a real game-changer in our agricultural sector. I want to thank you for having the consultations in Pembroke as well. They were well attended and very, very helpful and informative.

I know there are number of things there that are real game-changers: the additional seats at the universities, the \$50,000 allowance to encourage more veterinarians in rural and remote areas, but I want to focus more on the enhancement and expansion of the authorities of veterinary technicians. I see these as the nurse practitioners in our agricultural field now, where we're understanding that there just aren't enough doctors, so to speak, but we can give some additional authority to some other people that can be tremendously helpful.

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I would ask the PA if you could expand on just how important and significant this change is going to be and what it's going to mean to our agricultural sector.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the member for that very relevant question. That whole continuum of care has to include farmers, it has to include the people that—it could be pet owners. Sometimes, modernizations include that continuum, using technology and using the people that have some experience, some training through different mediums—it could be through technology or through a veterinarian technician—to triage, care for and provide that whole wraparound level of care to extend that, especially in farming communities, remote communities and underserved areas.

Sometimes the veterinarian could be an hour- or a two-hour drive away while there is an animal emergency. To have someone in close proximity to provide that care, under professional guidance, is critical. This act addresses that.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I've been listening for the last hour to the presentation on the new bill. When we talk about animals, governments have come a long way. History tells us, where I come from, the former department of lands and forests would come in and kill our sled dogs. These are government officials that used to do that. That is for us to starve, right, so we don't continue our ways of life.

But this is 2024. Where I come from, we have this term, "reservation dogs," "reserve dogs" or "rez dogs." Sometimes they're overpopulated, and we don't have access to veterinarians on-reserve. How will this bill ensure that the people in Kiiwetinoong and fly-in First Nations have access to veterinary services?

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the member. Having had personal experience in communities like Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, Pikangikum and Curve Lake, I've experienced that disconnect of service, just as the member said. That's why this legislation takes certain

low-risk activities to practised people—they may be non-practising professionals, but they have the experience, they have the care. Just like a farmer outside of Thunder Bay may have an animal emergency, they have people on the farm with experience. That farmer may have experience. The community members in some of our northern communities have that experience.

Now they have enabling legislation to reach out to connect to someone with the care and say, "We don't have a vet on hand right now. We have an animal emergency," or "We have some concerns for the safety of animals." I can connect to someone with a level of care to provide that care to the animal and be fully protected under the law. Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Brian Riddell: My question is to the PA. I have two very, very spoiled Australian shepherds. They're like people to me. I was just wondering how this bill will affect the veterinary techs and the veterinarians and how it will help my animals live longer and be more successful in providing—I'm going to say entertainment, because that's what it is.

Mr. Trevor Jones: I appreciate that question. As a lifelong pet owner myself, you have to look out for the best interests of your family, and pets are family members. That's why I wanted to give a proper shout-out to my veterinarian, who has become a family friend. Her team of caring professionals are an extension of that professional care that is integral to our communities. They become our family members, our friends, and they'll answer the call at midnight if you have a pet emergency.

This enabling legislation, first and most importantly, enables veterinary technicians to practise a level of care to the full scope of their training and experience, where sometimes in the past it was limited. Little procedures that a vet tech can certainly take care of for your pets and for my pets had to be under the care and direct supervision of a veterinarian, who may be more apt to be taking care of more serious surgical concerns. So this enabling legislation allows everyone to do the care and to practise that care to the full scope of their training.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the remarks from the minister and from the parliamentary assistant.

We are largely in favour of this bill. It lays out ground rules for the regulation of veterinarians and regulation of vet techs—very important. But there's—and this is a legitimate question—a carve-out for chiropractors. I didn't hear it in the remarks, so I'd like if we could have an explanation of why there's a carve-out for chiropractors, which seems to be a human designation as opposed to a veterinary animal designation.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you for the question. What you're referring to is part of that whole continuum of care. Animal chiropractors are recognized, but their training is based on human subjects, human training, human anatomy—that musculoskeletal manipulation that many

of us benefit from. That care is one critical component, one important component, but it still represents a very small margin of that whole animal care practice. It's one component of care that some people—humans—would say, “I want to seek out this care,” but under the auspices of a veterinarian, under the supervision of a veterinarian, that's where the care begins.

That's what the college regulates, and that's where the legislation takes us. Other areas of care are important. That's one component, but I don't think it's really critical to the bigger conversation of advancing and modernizing animal care.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): We'll move to further debate.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to speak in this House, and not only on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane, but on behalf of my colleagues, as agriculture critic, in response to the government's introduction of Bill 171, An Act to enact the Veterinary Professionals Act, 2024 and amend or repeal various acts.

I'd like to start off my remarks by perhaps ruining the suspense and saying that we will be in favour of this bill, not only for some of the measures that are included, but for the way the bill itself has been presented and—I said this in committee on other legislation—the fact that this has had extensive consultation among all stakeholders. We also consulted the stakeholders, and not everyone agrees with everything, but everyone who was interested got to have their input, and that's really important; I give credit where credit is due and criticism where criticism is due. This has not always occurred in some of the other bills that this government has presented, and as a result, some of those bills have had to be rescinded. We are in favour of the content of the bill, but just the way it's done—this is the way, when you're developing legislation, that it should be done: Talk to the stakeholders, bring forward a comprehensive bill on one core issue or related issues. I'm not trying to make a pun here: There's no poison pill in this vet bill, and that's important.

Regardless of where we sit in this House, we are all here for the same reason: to make better legislation, to modernize legislation, to create new legislation. We are all parts of the partisan political process, but at the end of the day, we all have the same goal.

I believe that this bill is an example. I just want to repeat myself that this bill is an example, and I give credit to the minister and parliamentary assistant and their staff and to all the people who took the time to consult on the way this bill was presented. There might be changes needed in the future. We are all human; no one is perfect, and no piece of legislation is perfect either.

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This is a very important piece of legislation. When you're talking about veterinary medicine and the people who take care of our animals and our companion animals, our service animals and agricultural livestock—and actually, some of us have experience with all three. It's hard to describe, but there's a difference. Everyone here knows,

but maybe some people don't know—if there's anybody watching this—that I'm a farmer by trade, a dairy farmer for 35 years. So we had livestock, and we had a very close relationship with our vets. But we also have pets and had a different relationship with the vet with pets.

I'm going to be fairly—“blunt” is the wrong word, but realistic. Often, a farmer has a different relationship with an animal than a pet owner. For a time, my wife—we took over a service dog that was—someone with a wheelchair had a dog; it wasn't really a service dog. The dog was very well trained, but the dog became too much to handle. From that experience, we learned that someone who has a service animal has an incredibly different relationship than just a pet—not “just” a pet—or livestock. It was totally different—a dependence. To truly understand the impact that veterinary medicine has on everyone's lives, particularly on people who practise it and the people who work with animals, but on everyone's lives, you have to understand that.

It is incredibly hard to become a vet. Incredibly hard, and some would say perhaps too hard. Again, I'm being really—for many years, we haven't—and I give credit where credit is due: There are going to be now more seats to teach vets. I think we need more, but we have started. The bar is incredibly high to be a vet, and it needs to be. It's an incredibly skilled job.

But the bar, it doesn't need to be lowered. This isn't in this bill; I just want to say this. It doesn't necessarily need to be lowered, but it needs to be shifted perhaps a bit, because it's not just—and particularly for rural vets, livestock vets; actually, most rural areas are under-served, because when you have a lot of rural, you don't have a lot of houses. You have less people, and there's a reason.

But the practice of being a vet or a vet tech—and I'll get to them this afternoon. There's much different treating an animal in a veterinary clinic in a city or a town than there is calving a cow at 25 below, 20 miles outside of town. That's a reality. That's something that, unless you've grown up or been exposed to that—a lot of people who are incredible vets look at doing that and, quite frankly, they pick small animal—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): My apologies to the member. I was very enthralled in that speech, but we've run out of time. It's now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF CAMBRIDGE

Mr. Brian Riddell: It was a pleasure speaking about my two pets today. I'm sure Ginger and Scout are watching us right now on TV if Lassie isn't on.

Madam Speaker, with much pride, I share with you some very good news from a school in my riding today. The International School of Cambridge was recently ranked by the Fraser Institute as one of the top schools in Ontario. The school, which is owned and operated by the Islamic Centre of Cambridge, was one of 13 schools in the province to receive a perfect score of 10. As such, the school was ranked number one among 2,975 schools across Ontario.

The International School of Cambridge, formerly known as the Islamic School of Cambridge, was founded in 1992 and is attended by approximately 300 students enrolled in grade 8 all the way down to junior kindergarten. The school attracts students not only from Cambridge, but also from Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph and Brantford.

Mohammad Darr, chairman of the Islamic Centre of Cambridge, had this to say about the school's success: "We're really excited. It is a matter of great pride for us. We maintain high standards of teaching and quality facilities as the reasons that this school stands out among others."

The Fraser Institute's Report Card on Ontario's Elementary Schools ranks public, Catholic and independent schools based on nine academic indicators derived from the province-wide test results.

Congratulations to the students, teachers and administrators of the International School of Cambridge on a job well done.

LANDLORD AND TENANT BOARD

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The backlog at Ontario's Landlord and Tenant Board has expanded to over 53,000 cases. In Windsor West and across the province, we're amidst the most severe housing and homelessness crisis in recent history.

Every day, the Premier gives his commitment to providing shelter for the people of Ontario, yet year after year, tenants and landlords alike are left waiting for justice. Under this Conservative government, the wait-list has quadrupled. Since 2018 when this Premier formed government, the tribunal has handled fewer applications every single year.

This backlog is a testament to a system spiralling out of control, as highlighted in the report by Tribunal Watch Ontario. Tenants facing maintenance disputes endure extremely long waits of over 14 months for resolution, while landlords struggling with rent non-payment eviction cases are left hanging for more than a year. This is unacceptable.

The report highlights that the root of this issue lies in the politicization of the LTB by this Conservative government favouring political appointments over experienced professionals who have knowledge in the field to make decisions fairly and quickly.

Every day, my office hears from tenants and landlords about the serious consequences of this, with individuals having to bear significant personal costs: lost housing,

poor living conditions for tenants and significant financial hardships, particularly impacting small landlords.

My Ontario NDP colleagues and I continue to call on this government to implement much-needed reforms of the LTB as suggested by the Ombudsman. It's time to ensure that all Ontarians receive the justice and relief they so desperately need.

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Today, I'd like to highlight the importance of our local dairy farmers and dairy producers. On Monday, I attended the Stormont Dairy Producers annual general meeting in my riding. I'm really good at selling ice cream cones, but I'm no expert in dairy farming or agriculture. What I do know is that our local dairy farmers work long hours day and night to ensure our communities have high-quality dairy products.

At the AGM, I learned that Ontario is the second-largest dairy producer in Canada, accounting for over 32% of total dairy farm cash receipts in Canada. I also learned that dairy farming is the largest sector of Ontario agriculture, and as per the DFO 2023 Annual Report, Ontario is home to 3,213 dairy producers. That's pretty impressive.

Next month, I will be attending the Dairy Cares event in my riding. Dairy Cares is an important event for our community where local dairy farmers, stakeholders and agribusinesses from across SD&G come together to celebrate and thank our three local hospitals: the Cornwall Community Hospital, the Winchester District Memorial Hospital and Glengarry Memorial Hospital. All funds raised at the Dairy Cares event go to these three hospitals. Last year, the event raised \$187,488. I'm excited to know how much they can raise this year.

1020

CONSIGLIO DI NINO

Ms. Bhutika Karpoche: You meet many people in your life, and for whatever reason, some of them just stick with you. One person in my life is the Honourable Consiglio Di Nino. Sometimes it feels like the forces of the world wanted us to get to know each other. He was in the Senate when I was in kindergarten on the opposite side of the world. As a young activist, full of passion and energy, I was restless to change the world, and he was the wise sage with wisdom and encouragement along the way. He was the first person who told me I should run for office. Years later, I would seek public office—except as an NDP candidate. Even so, he endorsed me, donated to my campaign, and he has always championed me. I would go on to become the MPP for Parkdale–High Park, representing the very neighbourhood he grew up in as a young Italian immigrant boy.

He was a Parkdale kid. He worked at the TD bank at the corner of Jameson and Queen, and he went to school up the street on Roncesvalles, at St. Vincent de Paul.

Inspired by his mentors, he has lived with the motto "Life is about what you give, not what you get." And he

has given so much. He was a volunteer chair of the Harbourfront Corp.; president of the Canadian Italian business association; president of Scouts Canada, Toronto region; a founder of Villa Charities, and so on.

Most important to me, he has been the strongest voice for the Tibetan people in Canada. As someone who enjoyed high-altitude hiking, he went to Tibet and visited the Jokhang temple in Lhasa, the capital. While there, a monk took a big risk and secretly handed him a piece of paper with a message, and the message was to tell the world what was going on in Tibet. And Consiglio Di Nino has carried that message since that day, for over 30 years.

Con—or Uncle Con, as many call him—you’ve changed and shaped lives, including mine. Thank you for everything.

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FRANCOPHONIE

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Nous célébrons aujourd’hui la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, marquant une journée très importante pour les Franco-Ontariennes et Franco-Ontariens et les francophones de partout à travers le Canada.

La Journée internationale de la Francophonie a été créée en 1988 et elle est célébrée à chaque année le 20 mars, avec pour objectif le partage et l’appréciation de la langue française et de la culture francophone. Aujourd’hui, plus de 300 millions de francophones vivent sur les cinq continents. L’Ontario compte plus de 620 000 francophones, ce qui en fait la plus grande communauté francophone du Canada hors Québec. Dans l’ensemble, plus de 1,5 million d’Ontariens parlent français.

La journée de la Francophonie est l’occasion de se rassembler en tant que communauté et d’honorer la langue française. Et en 2020, monsieur le Président, ma collègue la membre de Mississauga-Centre a eu l’honneur de proposer des amendements à la Loi sur l’emblème franco-ontarien, afin de désigner le drapeau franco-ontarien comme emblème officiel de l’Ontario. Il a reçu la sanction royale et est devenu loi le 24 septembre 2020, et le drapeau franco-ontarien est devenu le huitième symbole officiel de l’Ontario.

Notre gouvernement reconnaît la contribution inestimable de la langue française à la vitalité et au succès de l’Ontario. Nous avons démontré cet engagement envers les francophones en modernisant la Loi sur les services en français pour la première fois en plus de 35 ans, monsieur le Président.

En tant que membre de la circonscription avec la plus grande présence francophone en Ontario, c’est avec beaucoup d’enthousiasme que je célèbre cette journée avec vous tous. Que vous fassiez partie de la communauté francophone ou que vous aspiriez à apprendre la langue, cette journée est pour vous.

WARD’S ISLAND ASSOCIATION CLUBHOUSE

Mr. Chris Glover: On Sunday morning, a devastating fire ripped through the Ward’s Island clubhouse on the

Toronto Islands. The clubhouse was built by the islanders in 1937-38 and for generations has been a gathering place for the island community. A white clapboard structure, it housed the Island Cafe, which was a favourite stop for a delicious meal and good company on the lawn near the ferry dock. The thing I’ll remember about the clubhouse was the screen door, because there’s something about the slamming of a screen door that just speaks of summer, and it’s not something that you would expect to hear in downtown Toronto.

Many irreplaceable archives were lost, including a handwritten list of islanders who served in World War II and photos of the community dating back to the 1930s.

The island community is a village and one of the tightest-knit communities in Toronto. Last night, the community gathered to mourn the loss of the beloved clubhouse. They sang, tied ribbons on the protective fencing, held lanterns from the Shadowland Theatre and encircled the ashes of the building to say goodbye.

While people are gathering the memories of the old clubhouse, they are beginning to think and talk about rebuilding, about creating a new gathering place for generations of islanders and visitors to meet, dance, organize, mourn and celebrate. As one islander said, “The spirit of this building will live on in a new form.”

GERARD O’MALLEY

Mr. John Yakubski: On February 29, the Madawaska Valley bid farewell to one of its leading citizens, Gerard O’Malley, just 10 days after his 65th birthday. Affectionately known as Tootie, he passed away while battling cancer. Well-known and deeply respected, he was a successful businessman, along with his partners Neil and Connie O’Reilly.

As co-owner-operator of the local Metro grocery store, Tootie was famous for his positive attitude, his unparalleled approach to customer service and his compassion and generosity to those in need. From his teenage years, he was laser-focused on his goals and willing to sacrifice and work hard to attain them.

What really set him apart was that, 40 years ago, he suffered a critical injury playing hockey and lived the rest of his life as a paraplegic. It was at this time that he faced his proverbial fork in the road. While it certainly was not easy, his determination and faith led him to choose a path of positivity and accepting each and every day as an opportunity. The life he lived after his accident has been an inspiration to so many, including myself. Rather than feeling sorry for himself, he did whatever he could do to enhance the lives of others. His examples of bearing his cross with a smile encouraged everyone he met to be better.

From his Metro family and all of their customers to the community at large, we were all gifted to witness his strength and grace facing his enormous challenges head on each and every day.

I was blessed to know Tootie most of his life. He leaves a mark on our community. It will not be forgotten. May he rest in peace.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: The drug-poisoning crisis in my riding and in communities across Ontario is at a breaking point. Last year, Ontario saw an estimated 3,644 drug-related deaths, and over 20,000 have died since 2018. That's 20,000 children, grandchildren, siblings, friends and neighbours.

On March 4, an urgent letter was sent to the Ministry of Health signed by over 50 advocacy organizations requesting direct emergency funding by March 29 to supervised consumption sites. These are clinics that provide scientifically-informed, evidence-based approaches to navigating a documented health condition. Staff here provide more than health care. They provide hope, connections and pathways to employment, housing and other services. As of yesterday, they received no response.

Safe consumption sites are essential to put an end to this crisis and they must include inhalation services and be scaled up immediately to prevent further tragedies. The crisis isn't going away.

I want to thank the passionate and underpaid nurses and staff of the CTS in Kitchener Centre who are proud of the deaths that they prevent everyday at their clinic. I also want to thank the staff of the Working Centre, Sanguen Health, A Better Tent City, Michael Parkinson and many others providing direct service and advocacy to support equitable access and care to all.

1030

TRAGEDY IN OTTAWA

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: As community leaders, we hope and we pray that a crisis never hits our community, that we never have to be with a family that is in desperate need. However, that is something that did happen in my community of Barrhaven in the city of Ottawa on March 6, when a woman—a mother—and her four children were murdered by a knife-wielding maniac.

My colleagues in Ottawa, we stood together with the remaining family member, the father of the four children and the husband of the woman, to mark the sadness and tragedy that befell him and our community.

I ask all members to think, if you're a parent, about the children that you have reared and raised, because it's one thing to see something on the news and to say what a terrible tragedy it is when four children die, but it's quite another to remember that those children could have been our children. For example, a two-and-a-half-year-old child, Kelly, was murdered. I think any of us who have had a child remember a two-and-a-half-year-old, when they first learn to smile and they know who their mom and dad are, and they bring us so much joy. They're worth every sleepless night.

There was a two-and-a-half-year-old child, Ranaya. I sat in front of her little, tiny white casket. Ranaya had this beautiful little smile. She looked like any two-and-a-half- or three-year-old would. The terrible twos: when they do something that you don't want them to do, but they're so cute, you laugh about it anyway.

Then there was the four-year-old sister. She was just beautiful. She had such a smile. Her name was Ashwini, and she had just started school. She was at that age where we remember our children becoming little people. They weren't quite babies, they're not quite big kids that go to elementary school, but they're just starting out, and you're starting to understand if they like the maths, the sciences, if they're into English and reading books or if they like to draw and they're more creative.

And then a grade 2 student, seven years old, a young boy, Inuka, who loved to play soccer with his friends and have lots of fun.

That's who died in my constituency on March 6—senseless, tragic deaths.

And the family, though they were Sri Lankan and, of course, they were also Buddhist, I reminded them that they were also Barrhavenites.

From the 911 call from a neighbour, to the local police who attended on the scene, to the paramedics who looked after the victims as well as the father, who had to go to the hospital, the hospital staff and, of course, the nurses and doctors there, straight through to the teachers at Monsignor Paul Baxter School, who had to explain to all of the students there the next day why two of their seats, two of their desks were empty—no words can express their tragic circumstances.

All I can say: I know, Speaker, on behalf of every good person in this chamber, which every one of us is, we wish that their memories be a blessing and that justice may be served.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: On Friday, March 8, we celebrate the invaluable social, economic, cultural and political contributions that women have made in our society. Women continue to shape the world and play an important role in advancing our society, whether that be through the role of mothers, wives, siblings, friends or co-workers.

International Women's Day also gives us an opportunity to acknowledge the progress made in advancing gender equality and working towards a world free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination, regardless of if it is on the basis of sex or race. We must continue to strive to create an environment where every woman has the opportunity to reach their full potential and be able to thrive and contribute fully to society.

Speaker, this past weekend, I had the opportunity to join Paddy Entertainments and Sonali Sandhu for their women's day celebration.

It is crucial we continue having conversations that amplify the voices of women, champion their rights and advocate for policies that promote inclusivity and justice. Together, let us continue to break barriers, defy expectations and build a future where every woman has the opportunity to reach their full potential. Happy International Women's Day.

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today some very special guests from the Federal Republic of Germany: Her Excellency Sabine Sparwasser, who is the ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Canada. Her Excellency is accompanied by Ms. Barbara de Tschaschell, the deputy consul general, and Mr. Florian Schrieverhoff, the vice consul. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislature today.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I do have an introduction and a birthday wish this morning. First off, as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, I would like to introduce Rob Johnston, principal and founder of the Canadian Academy of Osteopathy; Adriana Sauvé, vice-principal of the Canadian Academy of Osteopathy; and Mitchell Fitzpatrick, a local osteopath from my great riding of Newmarket–Aurora. The members of the Canadian Academy of Osteopathy and their graduates are visiting Queen's Park from across the province today, so I welcome you to Queen's Park.

Now, for the birthday wish, to my son, who is turning 17 years old today: Happy birthday, Robert John.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the members to make the introductions brief.

Mushkegowuk—James Bay is next.

M. Guy Bourgooin: Merci, monsieur le Président. En passant, bonne Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

Je voudrais féliciter les récipiendaires de l'Ordre de la Pléiade qui sont ici aujourd'hui : Ronald Bisson, Lise Bourgeois, Melinda Marie Chartrand, Claudette Gleeson, Abel Maxwell et Denis Poirier. Félicitations et bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: As a faculty member, I have the honour to welcome the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations today: Sue Wurtele, chair of the board; Mike Eklund, member-at-large; Leslie Jermyn, Queen's University Faculty Association; Mary Olmstead, Queen's University Faculty Association; and Marcus Harvey, Trent University Faculty Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to welcome OCUFA representatives from Waterloo region today: David Porreca, the Faculty Association of the University of Waterloo; and Rob Kristofferson, Marcia Oliver, Rob Case and Kimberly Ellis-Hale from Wilfrid Laurier University Faculty Association. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Good morning, everyone. I'd like to welcome a powerful Peter Toh to the chamber today. He's an iconic music man in Ontario and beyond—most famous for his fantastic Afrofest festival, which is held every year in beautiful Beaches–East York, Woodbine Park. Welcome to our House, Peter.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It's my pleasure to introduce, from the Canadian academy of osteopaths, Lee Jarvis, Tommy Gorecki and Matt Olsen.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'd like to welcome Penny Ormerod today. She's my intern from Brock

University. She is studying political science and labour studies. Welcome to your House, Penny, and thanks for all your hard work.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to rise today to welcome all OCUFA members to Queen's Park, with a special warm welcome to Helen Booker, University of Guelph Faculty Association. I look forward to our meeting later today.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: From the Canadian Academy of Osteopathy, I'd like to introduce Adriana Sauvé and Ian Fraser, Burlington osteopath, and colleagues from around the province who are here today for their lobby day. Welcome to Queen's Park.

1040

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I, too, would like to welcome members from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, OCUFA. A special welcome to Paul Andrews from McMaster University Faculty Association, Helen Booker from the University of Guelph and Ryan Ladner from Wilfrid Laurier University. Welcome to Queen's Park. I look forward to our meeting this afternoon.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'd like to welcome three delegates from the Canadian Academy of Osteopathy who I'll be meeting with later today: Nevena Prostran, Stephen Warner and Kitchener Centre resident Mitch Forster. Welcome to Queen's Park. I look forward to learning more about your work.

Mr. Trevor Jones: Good morning, Speaker. I'd like to offer a warm welcome to Sean Geene from my riding of Chatham-Kent–Leamington, father of page Alyssa. Welcome, Sean, and thank you for supporting your daughter.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to welcome the delegation that has joined us today from OCUFA, representing more than 18,000 faculty, academic librarians and academic professionals at Ontario's universities. In particular, I want to welcome Nig Narain, who is a faculty member at Western University and president of OCUFA; Jenny Ahn, who is the executive director of OCUFA; Rachel Heydon and Melody Viczko, who are from the UWOFA, the faculty association at Western University; Andrew Chater from Brescia Faculty Association; Ozden Sungur from Huron University College Faculty Association; Ben Muller from King's University College Faculty Association; Patrick Phillips from the York University Faculty Association; Cliff Caines from OCAD Faculty Association; and Dave Mason from TMU faculty association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I'll ask the members to keep their introductions as brief as possible.

Unless there are objections, I'd like to continue with introduction of guests.

Mr. Will Bouma: I'd like to welcome, from Brantford, Steph VanDyk, representing the Canadian Academy of Osteopathy.

MPP Jamie West: My friend Fabrice Colin is here. He's the president of Laurentian University Faculty Association. He also brought some friends from OCUFA:

Gautam Das from Lakehead University Faculty Association, Kristen Shaw from the Northern Ontario School of Medicine University Faculty and Staff Association, Todd Horton from the Nipissing University Faculty Association. They're joined as well by Kimiko Inouye from OCUFA staff.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I have two people from Niagara who are here today with the Canadian Academy of Osteopathy. We have Kristen Jarvis and Wayne Oliver, who are with the Niagara region delegation. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Joel Harden: Joining the congratulations to our friends from OCUFA who are here, particularly professors Dipto Sarkar and Dominique Marshall from Carleton University, my old stomping grounds—it's nice to see you here—and particularly professor Nigmendra Narain, one of the OCUFA leaders who I had the pleasure to go to grad school with. Nice to see you here, my friend.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: I, too, would like to rise today to recognize the Canadian Academy of Osteopathy and its principal and founder, Robert Johnston, and Adriana Sauvé, the vice-principal and CAO, as well as a number of their staff and graduates who are here with us from across the province.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I would like to welcome, from the OCUFA Ottawa delegation, Dipto Sarkar and Dominique Marshall from the Carleton University Academic Staff Association, and from the Association of Professors of the University of Ottawa, Philippe Frowd and Tyler Chamberlin. Thank you for a great meeting this morning.

Et de ma circonscription d'Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean, Ronald Bisson, récipiendaire de l'Ordre de la Pléiade : bienvenue et félicitations.

Hon. Neil Lumsden: The plan was to introduce my mother-in-law, Florence Warner, this morning, but I just got a note that she's been delayed because she got started celebrating her 101st birthday this morning. She's decided to continue to celebrate and not join us—only by watching us on television.

Florence, happy birthday.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I, too, would like to welcome members from OCUFA, particularly Paul Andrews, McMaster; Helen Booker, Guelph; Ryan Ladner, Wilfrid Laurier; Melody Viczko, Western; and OCUFA staff Michael Savage. I look forward to our meeting today.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: It's my pleasure today to welcome three of my co-op students from the Oakville community: Desha Barrow from King's Christian Collegiate, Sarah Kadhim from Iroquois Ridge High School and Ava Nouri from King's Christian Collegiate.

MPP Lise Vaugeois: I would like to welcome, from OCUFA, Gautam Das from Lakehead University—I also want to note that Gautam helped me through some difficulties when I was teaching at Lakehead; looking forward to speaking with you again—Fabrice Colin, Laurentian University; Kristen Shaw, Northern Ontario School of Medicine Faculty and Staff Association; Todd Horton from Nipissing University Faculty Association;

and Kimiko Inouye, OCUFA staff. Welcome to your House. I look forward to meeting with you this afternoon.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Today, myself and the member for Kitchener South-Hespeler are actually hosting a medical isotopes advocacy day, and we'd like to welcome all of our experts: Dr. Rebecca Wong from UHN radiation oncology; Caroline Barber from Novartis pharmaceuticals; Ram Mullur from Isotope Business; Dr. Sten Myrehaug, Sunnybrook; and Alex Wellstead and Mark Vineis from the Novartis pharmaceuticals.

I invite all members to join us right after question period in room 228 to discover the life-saving potentials of Ontario-made medical isotopes.

Mr. Chris Glover: Bonne journée de la Francophonie. I'd like to welcome to the House, from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, from my old stomping ground, York University, Patrick Phillips; Cliff Caines from the Ontario College of Art and Design; Dave Mason from the Toronto Metropolitan University; and Rachel Heydon from the University of Western Ontario Faculty Association. Welcome to your House. I look forward to meeting you this afternoon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Continuing on with our guests from our isotope advocacy day: From CNIC, we have Peter D'Amico, Melody Greaves, Andrew Thiele and Sabeeh Masud; and from OPG we have Terry Campkin. We may have Karin Stephenson from McMaster, and then from our wonderful sponsors of the event, Bruce Power, we have Clint Thomas, James Scongack, and I don't know if she's there, Lindsay Grummett—if you're listening, you're in my heart. Welcome to your House. So looking forward to our lunch.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to welcome osteopaths from Hamilton: Tommy Gorecki, Marc Tellez and Graham Nishikawa. I also want to thank my osteopath, Dryden Tanner, for keeping me moving after having sat in these chairs for hours on end. Thank you to all the osteopaths who are here today.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I'd love to welcome from the Canadian Academy of Osteopathy Wayne Oliver, Kristen Jarvis and Matthew Olson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure today to introduce two very important people to me. Many people here know these two individuals. The first one had her booties changed when she was learning how to walk upstairs and got a big cake when she was a page here: my daughter, who has now turned 19—she's not a baby anymore like she was up in the gallery when I got first elected 18, 19 years—Victoria Varner. You can just wave to people.

The second person is my husband, Joe, who, of course, was my campaign manager over the past six elections. I fired him many times, but he has stood by me, particularly for the last couple of years when I've been sick. When I lost control, this guy took the driver's seat and he looked after the wheel. He's here today too. You can wave.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnett): That concludes our introduction of visitors for this morning.

I understand that the member for Orléans has a point of order.

M. Stephen Blais: Je demande le consentement unanime pour permettre aux députés de faire des déclarations après le dépôt de projets de loi aujourd'hui pour souligner la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, avec cinq minutes accordées aux députés indépendants en tant que groupe, cinq minutes accordées à la loyale opposition de Sa Majesté et cinq minutes accordées au gouvernement de Sa Majesté.

1050

Le Président (L'hon. Ted Arnott): Le député d'Orléans a demandé le consentement unanime pour permettre—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader, to speak to the point of order.

L'hon. Paul Calandra: Merci, monsieur le Président. Comme vous le savez, la ministre ne peut pas être ici; elle attend les funérailles nationales de son père. Par respect, nous retardons la reconnaissance de la journée jusqu'à son retour.

Le Président (L'hon. Ted Arnott): Le député d'Orléans a demandé le consentement unanime pour permettre aux députés de faire des déclarations après le dépôt de projets de loi aujourd'hui pour souligner la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, avec cinq minutes accordées aux députés indépendants en tant que groupe, cinq minutes accordées à la loyale opposition de Sa Majesté et cinq minutes accordées au gouvernement de Sa Majesté.

D'accord? I heard a no.

QUESTION PERIOD

ONTARIO PLACE

M^{me} Marit Stiles: J'aimerais reconnaître qu'aujourd'hui nous célébrons la Journée internationale de la Francophonie. Alors, bonne journée de la Francophonie, tout le monde.

My question is for the Premier. The NDP has unearthed new documents revealing plans for a phase 2 of the Ontario Place redevelopment that, for some reason, this government kept secret from Ontarians. We know what phase 1 is. That's the backroom deal where government, we know, is spending hundreds of millions of public dollars and handing over public land to a private luxury spa company for 95 years. But what is phase 2 and why has the government kept it a secret from Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply for the government, the Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you to the member opposite. Now, I'm not sure where she was on April 18, 2023, when I joined the Premier and Live Nation at Ontario Place. The entire Queen's Park press gallery was there and that's where we showcased the fact that we're building a new science centre, a water park facility, a wellness facility on the west end, 50 acres of public realm space and a brand new marina, as well as a brand new amphitheatre stage for Live Nation. That is our mission for Ontario Place, and we are under construction today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, I'm going to tell you why this matters. It's because Ontarians know that they can't trust this government on anything. Renderings in a ministry document that were dated from September 2020 reveal that phase 2 of the Ontario Place redevelopment includes a plan to make the east island part of the mainland by filling in the lake.

My question is, when was the Premier going to tell the public his secret plan to pave over Lake Ontario?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Let me just remind the member opposite of the timeline. In 2019 we announced our vision for Ontario Place, which is to bring it back to life, to have things to do for families there, to protect it from flooding. Shortly thereafter, we announced our partners, which are, of course, Therme and Live Nation. Today, we are constructing the full vision for Ontario Place that we shared back on April 18, 2023, when, again, I joined the Premier and Live Nation to announce we're building a brand new science centre, a water park facility, 50 acres of public realm space, as well as a brand new amphitheatre. Today we are under construction, and we will make sure that this vision comes to life and that Ontario Place is not ignored anymore.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Let's be clear: The only reason we know about this phase 2 is because we unearthed it. They didn't announce anything like that. And let's be clear: The Premier has been secretly planning to pave over Lake Ontario for more than three years and hid it because he knew that Ontarians would not approve.

The whole Ontario Place redevelopment scheme has been cloaked in secrecy from the beginning. The Premier won't tell the public the terms of the 95-year lease that they have with Therme. Time and again, the only reason why we know anything about this government's real intentions is because of our own investigative work.

I would like to know, on behalf of Ontarians: What else is the Premier keeping secret from the people of Ontario?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Mr. Speaker, again, in 2019, we announced that we wanted to bring Ontario Place back to life and have activities for families to do. In 2021, we announced our partners, which are Therme and Live Nation. And in April 2023, again, the entire press gallery at Queen's Park, including other media, was at Ontario Place joining the Premier, myself and Live Nation to share the full vision of Ontario Place, which included the science centre, a brand new amphitheatre, 50 acres of public realm space and a brand new marina, as well as a wellness facility and water park.

Today, we are under construction and we will make sure to bring Ontario Place back to life for the people of Ontario.

ONTARIO PLACE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the more light we shine on this sketchy deal, the worse it gets for the public, for the environment and for the taxpayers too.

I'm going back to the Premier. Late last year, the government jammed through a bill that would exempt all undertakings at Ontario Place from the Environmental Bill of Rights and from the Environmental Assessment Act. Did the Premier change the laws to try and get away with his secret plan to pave over Lake Ontario?

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: Mr. Speaker, again, I am happy to repeat my answer. We announced our vision back in 2019. In 2021, we announced our partners, which are Therme and Live Nation. And in April 2023—I remember that day very clearly, because it started to snow at the end of April—we announced our full vision for Ontario Place, which includes a brand new science centre, a brand new stage, 50 acres of public realm space for the public to enjoy, as well as a wellness facility and a water park.

I am very excited, because construction is under way at Ontario Place, and finally, after years and years of neglect, the people of Ontario will have a wonderful Ontario Place to enjoy with their families.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: No, no, no, no. This was not announced in 2019, 2022 or 2023; this was hidden from the people of Ontario.

The Premier—I will remind you, Speaker—jammed through a bill that would allow the government to ignore the provincial laws when it comes to Ontario Place. I remind the members here that the bill even lets the government commit acts of misrepresentation, misfeasance, breach of trust and bad faith without any consequences, and this is the same government under RCMP criminal investigation for another scandal.

I wonder why they passed that bill. Did the Premier jam through this wildly irresponsible bill because he knew that his secret plans for Ontario Place would not survive public scrutiny or judicial review?

Interjections.

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

The Premier can respond.

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition nailed it: It's "no, no, no, no" to everything we do, and that's why we're in the position we were in when we inherited a bankrupt province five and a half years ago. Let's move forward now.

We're putting \$184 billion into infrastructure. We're building \$50 billion worth of new hospitals. We're building the 413 and the Bradford Bypass. We're adding new doctors; we're adding new nurses. But guess what? "No, no, no, no." That's why we walked into an absolute disaster when we inherited this province.

But guess what? We're the leaders in the world. We're an economic powerhouse now. We have \$28 billion of EV vehicles being built here in Ontario. We have tens of billions in tech. We have \$3 billion when it comes to life

sciences. Everyone in the world is talking about Ontario Place.

Thank God you and the Liberals aren't still in charge. It would be a complete disaster.

1100

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: What they are is a shady government under investigation by the RCMP. That's what they are, and we won't forget it.

Speaker, we now know that the Premier has been secretly planning to pave over a portion of Lake Ontario for more than three years. He pushed for a secret deal to hand over public land to a private luxury spa operator for 95 years—95 years. Who does that? Then he changed environmental and integrity laws just to force through his personal vanity project. If that doesn't smell bad, I don't know what does.

To the Premier: What are the real plans for Ontario Place, and which of the Premier's insider friends are set to benefit?

Interjections.

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

The Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Mr. Speaker, let's go with the NDP and Liberal plan. Let's leave it just the way it was—weeds growing up; no one's going to Ontario Place. It just sat absolutely bare. Or let's go with our plan that's going to be the number one tourist attraction, not just in Ontario but in Canada. Mark my words.

The ironic thing is, their families, their constituents, guess where they're going? They're going to the brand new Ontario Place. Even Therme told me one time, "We build world-class facilities around the world. They roll out the red carpet." But here in Toronto, with the NDP and the Liberals, it's a whole different ballgame. They don't believe in creating anything.

That's the reason, under their leadership, they chased 300,000 jobs out of this province, made it uncompetitive compared to today. There's 700,000 people collecting a paycheque, being able to put a deposit down on anything they may want because we are an economic powerhouse, and it kills them. It actually kills them to see we're thriving as a province—world-class.

ONTARIO PLACE

Mr. Chris Glover: I've been listening to the Premier and the minister's non-answers this morning. I can tell you, I was at the government's press conference in April 2023 and you did not disclose the full vision for Ontario Place. The only reason we know about your plan to pave over a portion of Lake Ontario is because we got it through freedom-of-information requests.

This government had this deal cloaked in secrecy from the beginning, and they refused to release the terms of the

95-year lease. Now they won't tell anything about what they call phase 2 of the plans for Ontario Place. What else is the Premier keeping secret from the people of Ontario?

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member.

Again, we held a competitive process in 2019 to bring Ontario Place back to life. In 2021, we partnered—we announced our partners, which are Live Nation and Therme. And in April 2023, the member just admitted that he was at Ontario Place when our government made the announcement where we shared that we would build a new science centre, a wellness water park facility, 50 acres of public realm space, and a brand new amphitheatre and Live Nation stage. The member just admitted that he was there at the announcement. That is our focus now. Our focus is to construct the vision that we shared in April when the member was there with us.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: The minister won't release the secret 95-year deal, and that says it all.

Late last year, the Conservatives passed Bill 154, which exempted the Ontario Place redevelopment project from obligations under the Environmental Bill of Rights and the Environmental Assessment Act. The bill was jammed through this House with little public input.

Did the Premier push through this bill because he wanted to avoid the public scrutiny of his secret plan to pave over Lake Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Infrastructure.

Hon. Kinga Surma: I'm more than happy to speak about the new deal that we landed with the city of Toronto.

Mr. Speaker, in the new deal, we will be providing operational funding for transit; we will be providing funding for the city of Toronto to keep TTC riders safe. Contingent upon federal funding, we will also be providing funding for our homeless and for shelters.

We're very proud of the new deal that we landed in the fall and the legislation that was presented before Christmas. And of course, we're very happy to continue to work with the city of Toronto to bring Ontario Place back to life so that families can enjoy the site once again.

TAXATION

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Finance.

Speaker, under the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, businesses left our province in droves. In contrast, under the leadership of our Premier, our government has welcomed record levels of investments, job growth, and businesses.

Unfortunately, the federal government has decided to punish hard-working people and business owners with a

regressive carbon tax—a tax that is set to, believe it or not, increase 23% next month. It is not right or fair that people and businesses have to bear an additional cost that is forced on them, especially at a time when all governments need to prioritize affordability.

Can the minister please tell this House what our government is doing to help Ontario families and businesses cope with the high cost of the carbon tax?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member for your question and the great work that you do in the riding of Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday we heard Liberal leader Bonnie Crombie refuse again to call for an end to the federal Liberal carbon tax. That same Liberal carbon tax is set to increase in Ontario in just under two weeks.

Whether here or in Ottawa, both Liberal Parties are doubling down on making life more expensive and more unaffordable for Ontarians.

But our government is standing up for the people of this great province. This is why we will not stop the work to lower costs, cut taxes and make life more affordable. And that's why we continue to call on the federal government to do the right thing and finally scrap the tax.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you to the minister for his response.

When it comes to the negative impact of the carbon tax, everyone shares the same concerns.

While our government continues to keep costs down for the people of Ontario, the federal Liberals remain persistent on their position in hiking this tax. On top of that, their provincial counterparts are in support of this money-grabbing practice.

Under the carbon tax queen, Bonnie Crombie, the Liberal members in this House refuse to acknowledge their constituents' struggles, refuse to bring forward people's concerns on the carbon tax and refuse to fight against the federal government's unjust action. That's not what the people in their ridings elected them to do.

Can the minister please explain, if the independent Liberals won't help and the federal Liberals won't listen, what our government is doing to ensure Ontario's economy continues to thrive and prosper in 2024 and beyond?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the member for that question.

Speaker, on this side of the aisle, we know that things are expensive right now. That's why we took action to cut the price of gas, to lower the cost of transit and to eliminate tolls right across the province. We are putting billions of dollars back in the pockets of Ontarians. In fact, since we cut the gas tax, we've put \$2.1 billion in the pockets of Ontarians.

But across the aisle is a Liberal Party who have yet to find a tax they didn't like to raise. When it comes to cutting the gas tax and saving our drivers money, they voted no. But when it comes to standing up for Ontarians against the federal Liberal carbon tax, their leader made it clear that it wasn't her problem.

1110

Mr. Speaker, it's time for Ontario Liberals to decide if they are for Ontario or if they are for an expensive and tax-loving federal government.

SERVICES DE SANTÉ DANS LE NORD

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Bonne journée de la Francophonie, monsieur le Président. Ma question est pour le premier ministre.

Un article de Radio-Canada a choqué plusieurs francophones du Nord : le nombre de Nord-Ontariens et Nord-Ontariennes sans médecin de famille pourrait doubler d'ici deux ans. Ça voudrait dire 62 900 personnes sans médecins à Sudbury, Manitoulin et Parry Sound.

Soixante-cinq pour cent des médecins de famille envisagent de quitter ou de changer de pratique dans les cinq prochaines années, principalement dû à la paperasse. Est-ce que le premier ministre va financer les équipes interdisciplinaires et libérer le temps des médecins de famille dans le nord de l'Ontario?

Le Président (L'hon. Ted Arnott): La ministre de la Santé.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Oh, it is indeed a new day at Queen's Park when the NDP are talking about too much overhead. I'm gobsmacked.

Primary care expansion is something that our government has been focused very directly on, whether it is expanding access through our colleges and universities, whether it is expansions of \$110 million, 78 new primary care multidisciplinary teams in the province of Ontario that are going to make an impact, and they're going to make an impact in northern Ontario, in southern Ontario, in southwestern Ontario. We will continue to get this work done because we know how critically important it is to expand primary care multidisciplinary teams in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Monsieur le Président, le nord de l'Ontario est en pénurie de 300 médecins de famille. En donnant accès aux médecins de famille à des équipes interdisciplinaires, on ajouterait l'équivalent de 2 000 médecins dans le système.

Est-ce que le premier ministre va financer les équipes interdisciplinaires pour améliorer l'accès des gens du Nord, l'accès des francophones du Nord, à des médecins de famille qui peuvent parler français?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Yes, we absolutely can, and we absolutely will. The member opposite would know that we have a number of multidisciplinary teams in northern Ontario: the Lakehead Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic in Thunder Bay, the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority, the Sioux Lookout Area Primary Care Team, the Sioux Lookout, again, primary care teams. We have the Powassan and Area Family Health Team. We have the Greenstone Family Health Team in Geraldton. We have

the Kenora Chiefs Advisory in Kenora. We have the NorWest Community Health Centres in Thunder Bay.

Speaker, I could go on and on. The point is, we are making those investments in multidisciplinary teams because we know that's what patients and clinicians deserve, and it provides the best service.

TAXATION

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is for the Minister of Energy. I regularly hear from people in my riding of Flamborough-Glanbrook about how the federal carbon tax is driving up the cost of living. They know that every April, the Liberals and the NDP will raise the price at the gas pumps with terrible carbon tax hikes. This year, the cost per litre at the gas pump will rise from just over 14 cents to almost 18 cents. This is unacceptable.

Many Ontarians, particularly those in rural communities, rely heavily on their vehicles for work and other day-to-day activities. They are being burdened financially by this harmful tax. Speaker, enough is enough. It's time for the federal government to end the carbon tax. Can the minister tell the House how the carbon tax affects drivers right across Ontario?

Hon. Todd Smith: Speaker, thank you to the member from Flamborough-Glanbrook for the question today. The federal government continues to increase the carbon tax. We're in the midst of an affordability crisis in Ontario and across the country. And in spite of the fact that affordability is the number one issue when you talk to people across the country, the federal government is poised to increase that carbon tax by a staggering 23% on April 1.

Now, we want to know where the Ontario Liberal Party stands on this. Earlier this week, the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, said that she wouldn't impose a provincial carbon tax. However, she still hasn't made it clear whether or not she supports the federal carbon tax.

But do you know who did clarify her position on it yesterday at a press conference, Mr. Speaker? The federal environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, had something to say. I look forward to sharing with the House what the federal environment minister interprets Bonnie Crombie's position to be.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Back to the minister: Ontario families should not have to choose between heating their homes or putting food on the table. But unlike the opposition NDP and the independent Liberals, our government understands how harmful this tax is for hard-working Ontarians. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, by the year 2030, the carbon tax will cost families \$2,000 per year, even with those climate rebates.

At a time when families across the country are dealing with the high cost of living, all governments should be working together to make life more affordable for everyone. Can the minister tell the House what our government is doing to counteract the impact of this terrible carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: One of the largest tax breaks in the province's history: We have cut the gas tax by 10.7 cents a litre—one of the largest tax breaks ever. When you're in the midst of an affordability crisis, should a government be increasing taxes, Mr. Speaker? The answer is no. Everybody knows that. Anybody who has any sense knows that, but the federal government, in less than two weeks, is going to increase the carbon tax by a staggering 23%.

Now, the provincial Liberal member, the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, the leader of the Liberals here in the House, said that she wouldn't impose a provincial tax, but she didn't say whether or not she supported the federal Liberal carbon tax. So what did Minister Guilbeault say in a press conference yesterday when asked about Bonnie Crombie's position on the federal carbon tax? He said, "My understanding of her position is that she would be happy"—happy—"to fall back to the federal system." That tells me that Bonnie Crombie is supportive—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The next question, the member for London West.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, decades of chronic underfunding of post-secondary education by both Liberal and Conservative governments, followed by five years of Conservative cuts, have pushed our post-secondary system to the brink. Ontario is dead last in per-student funding—has been for years—which means larger classes for students, higher faculty workloads, greater reliance on precarious contract faculty and less time for faculty-student contact.

At least 10 universities in this province are already in deficit, and that number is going to grow, despite the government's disastrous recent funding announcement. My question to the Premier: Will the government commit to the funding necessary to stabilize and preserve our world-class post-secondary system?

Interjections.

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

To reply, the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Under the leadership of this Premier, we just invested \$1.3 billion in post-secondary education, the largest investment in over a decade in post-secondary education. We are giving schools the stability and the predictability that they need, and we are not doing it on the backs of Ontario students.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to freeze tuition for an additional three years. Looking back under the Liberal leadership, Ontario had the highest post-secondary education tuition in all of Canada. Under the leadership of this Premier, we decreased tuition by 10% and we have continued to freeze it. We are going to ensure that every student in this province has accessibility and affordability when it comes to post-secondary education.

1120

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The minister knows full well that the funding that was announced won't come close to keeping Ontario's post-secondary system afloat. And all the while, the clock is ticking on the international student study permits that have been effectively subsidizing our post-secondary system in this province. Colleges and universities are in limbo, unable to plan until they know how the permits will be allocated, leaving students' futures up in the air. Queen's and Guelph have already announced program cuts. More programs—even campuses—may have to close.

My question is, does the Premier understand how serious the consequences are of refusing to properly fund our colleges and universities in Ontario?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: It sounds like the member is in favour of increasing tuition. Under the leadership of this Premier, we are going to ensure that students have affordable and accessible education in the province. That's why we're investing a historic \$1.3 billion in post-secondary education. That's an additional \$100 million for the 65,000 STEM graduates out there and the 30,000 nursing students in our system.

We have an incredible, world-class post-secondary education system in Ontario, and we are going to ensure that with \$1.3 billion, we are giving schools the affordability and the predictability that they need to ensure that we have and continue to have world-class education here in this province.

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Over the past few months, all members have been receiving postcards with the slogan "#5ToSurvive," a campaign started by Community Living Ontario. Of the 10,000 letters sent, response from my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk has been most pronounced. Families of loved ones with developmental disabilities see agencies like Community Living Haldimand, the Norfolk Association for Community Living and Community Living Access being starved of the resources they need to assist some of society's most vulnerable people—agencies that are so important to families.

This government has done some good things, like tying ODSP to inflation. There has been good news, but if the agencies that sustain the people they support aren't sustainable, it's a moot point.

Over the past 30 years, community living organizations have seen a meagre 3.9% increase to base funding. This is a sector that needs an immediate infusion.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Will Ontario families supporting loved ones with developmental disabilities see the long-awaited 5% increase in the upcoming budget?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague for the very important question. Let me make it very clear: We said it, and the Premier has been very clear that we will make sure that no one in Ontario is left behind. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we are investing over \$1.5 billion in the sector, to make sure that everyone receives service. Just to put it in perspective, that is \$1 billion more than the previous government was investing, over half a billion dollars more than when we formed government, in supportive living for those who require service.

The previous government simply did not do enough. That wasn't good enough for this Premier. That wasn't good enough for this caucus. We said that we were not going to leave anyone behind. We are going to be there to provide them with the service. We've been there. I have visited literally every Community Living service, including the one in the member's riding, to make sure that they know they have a partner in this government, and we will not abandon them like the previous government did. We will—

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

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: As I recognized in my original question, there have been some measures taken, but a car without its tires won't reach its destination. It's not hard: Just say yes to the 5%.

I've met with a number of these agencies a number of times, and they are beaten down. They simply cannot find further savings. Programming has been and is being cut, and there has been an exodus of underpaid staff. A 5% increase would be just enough to stabilize the sector and keep the lights on. It represents about \$145 million to the base budget.

I sat through pre-budget consultations last year, where Community Living rang the alarm bells. They were back at the budget table this year. How many times do they have to show up before this government will take responsibility that they are the government of the day and they have to take meaningful action? I suggest this government stop talking about building houses for five seconds and listen to the 100,000 people who are currently needing this government's help. It's time to put the tires back on the car and let the rubber hit the road.

Speaker, will the minister promise the 100,000 individuals and their families that the 2024 budget will ensure there will be no further cuts to their supports and services?

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, I thank the honourable member for the question. Let me make it clear for the member and everyone in this House, no, we're not going to stop building homes in this province. That's what I said earlier in my answer.

The member is talking about investment. I'd be more than happy to repeat that. Mr. Speaker, we're investing over \$3.7 billion in the developmental services sector this year. That is a billion dollars more than when we formed government. The member talks about housing. I'd be more than happy to repeat that, Mr. Speaker: Nearly a half a

billion dollars more is being invested in supportive living for people in this province who rely on the housing.

And no, we're not going to stop. We're going to make sure that every single person in this province who relies on supports and services gets them, because before, in the previous government, they simply weren't getting that. That's not good enough for us. We'll continue to fight for them. We'll sure that they have the support they need.

TAXATION

Ms. Laura Smith: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. From coast to coast, elected officials of all political stripes have been very vocal in calling on our federal government to stop the planned carbon tax hike on April 1. Even the Liberal Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador has come out against the 23% carbon tax hike. And yet, Bonnie Crombie and the Liberals in this House still stand shoulder to shoulder with their federal counterparts in support of the carbon tax.

Unlike them, we've knocked on doors. We've heard loud and clear from the people of Ontario: They do not support another carbon tax hike. Speaker, can the minister please share what he's been hearing from businesses and workers when it comes to the Liberals' planned carbon tax hike?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, we have lowered the cost of doing business in Ontario by \$8 billion annually. We've reduced taxes. We've cut red tape. We've shown the Liberals the way. This is how you bring business to Ontario.

You know, Speaker, we have an incredibly diverse economy here. No one industry accounts for more than 15%, but each and every one of those businesses that we visit tells us the same thing: "Get rid of the carbon tax." It is driving up the cost of everything. It is driving up the cost of business. It is driving up the cost in households, and it risks jeopardizing all the competitive advantage that we've brought to Ontario.

We need the Liberals and the NDP to pick up the phone, call their federal representatives and tell them to scrap the tax today.

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

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the minister for his answer and important work for the people of Ontario.

The message we are hearing from the people of Ontario is loud and clear. It doesn't matter if it is the minister's constituents in Nipissing or my constituents in Thornhill; we all want the carbon tax gone. We hear their concerns and that's why we've been so persistent in calling on the federal government to stop their planned carbon tax increase on April 1.

We know what happens when Liberals implement tax hike after tax hike, because the previous Liberal government tested out this same playbook. Speaker, can the minister please remind us of how the previous Liberal government's agenda of high taxes played out?

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, the people of Ontario remember very well what life was like under the Liberals. Their high taxes crushed businesses. They penalized workers. They sent 300,000 manufacturing jobs fleeing from the province of Ontario.

But we took the opposite approach. We cut 500 pieces of red tape. We lowered taxes. That's why, as you heard the Premier say only a few minutes ago, \$28 billion in auto has landed in Ontario, \$3 billion in life sciences has landed in Ontario, tens of billions of dollars in tech has landed in Ontario, and all that adds up to 700,000 new jobs created.

1130

Remember, 300,000 jobs lost under the Liberals; 700,000 jobs gained under this PC Party. We showed the Liberals the way. Low taxes are how you create jobs. Stop the tax now.

SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE

LONG-TERM CARE

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Les francophones du nord de l'Ontario sont les grands oubliés des soins de longue durée. Les gens se demandent s'ils amènent leurs aînés loin de chez eux pour des soins de longue durée en français.

Monsieur le Premier Ministre, vous faites quoi pour augmenter le nombre de lits de longue durée dans Mushkegowuk—Baie James?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Stan Cho: It's an important issue that's raised by the member opposite, and I appreciate that he does that this morning. Culturally sensitive homes are very important in this province. We have a diverse population, and a growing aging population at that, and we must be sensitive to the different cultural diversity in this great province of ours. That, of course, includes French Canadians. That's why, Speaker, we are building record capacity into the system, with \$10 billion in expansion—the largest in our country's history—creating 58,000 new and redeveloped spaces, as well as culturally specific homes designated to cater towards those communities.

Now, the member does raise an important issue when it comes to rural and northern areas. That's why we need to continue to build and continue to invest and attract health human resources. We've done that under the leadership of this Premier: nearly \$5 billion, the largest expansion into health human resources in, again, our country's history. There is, of course, more to be done. That's why we continue to introduce local priorities, specialized equipment to cater to those unique communities. We're going to stay on that goal, Speaker. We're well on the way to making sure that we take care of our seniors, because they took care of us.

Le Président (L'hon. Ted Arnott): Le député de Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

M. Guy Bourgouin: J'apprécie la réponse du ministre, mais la réalité ne reflète pas vos paroles. Les Franco-

Ontariens vont se rappeler que c'est sous votre gouvernement qu'on voit un lit pour 3 400 francophones alors que c'est un lit pour 170 anglophones.

Monsieur le Premier Ministre, vous nous avez promis 68 lits à Kapuskasing il y a plus de deux ans. Quand est-ce qu'on va les voir, ces lits-là?

Hon. Stan Cho: Another couple of important issues raised by the member there, Speaker—new nursing standards, of course, introduced at Boréal college; a new nursing program; more nurses in the system now than ever before; 17,000 nurses introduced into the system last year; \$100 million into the LEAP program for those who wish to scale up their skills from PSWs to nurses to nurse practitioners—they are able to do that—and record investments that the Liberals simply failed to do.

Interjections.

Hon. Stan Cho: Now, Speaker, there was a budget, successive budgets, that highlighted all of those announcements. Do you know what the member there and the Liberals, who are chirping for some reason, share in common? They voted against every single one of those measures.

There's a budget—six more sleeps to go—by the fine finance minister over here. I hope that the member learns that if he wants to build capacity in the north, as he wants in Kapuskasing—and the Liberals, who are chirping, want to do better than they did in their past mistakes, by not building beds—well, vote in favour of the budget. I look forward to that support. We're going to continue to take care of seniors in this—

Interjections.

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

PUBLIC TRANSIT

MPP Andrea Hazell: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. The TTC is falling apart under his watch. It is in shambles. Delays are rampant, streetcars get stuck in unbearable traffic and slow zones on the subway are doubling trip times. After six years of neglect by this government, riders have lost faith in their public transit. This is not just an issue for residents of Toronto. People from across the GTA rely on the TTC to get to work and to their families on time.

This government is letting some of the busiest transit lines fall apart, neglecting existing infrastructure at the detriment of all who use our transit. This government literally allowed the Scarborough RT to fall off the tracks and risk the lives of transit riders.

Mr. Speaker, through you, will this minister give the TTC the financial support it needs?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, I don't even know where to start on that. I can't believe that question, coming from the Liberals, who did absolutely nothing for 15 years when they held the balance of power.

But under the leadership of Premier Ford, places like Scarborough are getting the Scarborough subway extension—a place where those Liberals talked a big game but did absolutely nothing and left the people of Scarborough

with no options. We've got shovels in the ground, but that's not it. When the city came to the province for help, it was Premier Ford who struck a historic deal to support the TTC and the record expansion of public transit that we're having in the city of Toronto. The Ontario Line: 15 kilometres of a new transit line that is being introduced by this Premier, under his leadership—while the Liberals did nothing to build Ontario.

We will take no lessons from them, Mr. Speaker. It's because of this Premier, our government, the people of Scarborough, Toronto and across this province—

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: It is always the same excuse from this government, but they have the formula entirely backwards. It's like building a new extension on a house while its very foundation is rotten and crumbling.

The provincial funding formula is not tied to inflation, so the TTC is getting the same amount of funding as it did in 2007. The Conservatives are asking the TTC to do more and more with less, and it is transit riders who are paying the price.

To the minister: Does he realize that if they keep neglecting some of the busiest transit lines in the province, this government's legacy will be a complete loss of faith in Ontarians' public transit because we have a broken TTC?

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

Hon. Doug Ford: You know something, I don't even know how to respond here, but I'm going to give it a shot.

Fifteen years—nothing was done in Scarborough. They had every single seat in Scarborough, and Triple M sitting beside you—actually, part of the deal with the federal government to build the Scarborough line back in 2010, 2011. We had a historic deal. Guess who shut it down? It was the Liberal provincial government—your government—that shut it down.

We're actually doubling the size of the subway system. This is the largest subway expansion in North America: \$28 billion. As the Liberals ignored the over 630,000 people of Scarborough—just keep in mind again: They had every single riding. Thank God they don't have any of the ridings.

We're going to continue fighting for the people of Scarborough because under the Liberal government, they were totally ignored. They aren't being ignored anymore. We love the people of Scarborough. And by the way: We're going to get your seat next election.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Order. Once again, order.

Once again, I'll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair, not directly across the floor of the House at each other. And secondly, we refer to each other either by our riding name or by a ministerial title, as applicable, not by nicknames.

We can start the clock. The member for Thornhill.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Laura Smith: My question is for the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery. Last Friday, our government joined the international community in recognizing World Consumer Rights Day. This is a time to raise awareness and highlight the importance of knowing your rights when purchasing goods and services in the marketplace.

Speaker, ensuring consumer protection is important for all Ontarians. We need to have access to safe and fair and reliable products and services for our economy to thrive.

I know our government recently passed legislation to advance consumer protections in our province. Speaker, could the minister please explain how this new legislation will enhance enforcement and prohibit unfair business practices in Ontario?

1140

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the excellent member for Thornhill for that thoughtful question. Last fall our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, introduced comprehensive consumer protection legislation. After a decade and a half of Liberal government neglect, this House unanimously passed the Better for Consumers, Better for Businesses Act, 2023.

I want to emphasize the sheer scope of this legislation. Nearly every single Ontarian engages in marketplace transactions online or in our communities. We're all consumers. That is why our government is taking responsibility to ensure marketplace fairness and competition. We have tackled unfair business practices, made it easier for Ontarians to cancel subscriptions and membership agreements, protected a consumer's right to take action in small claims court and increased fines for bad actors using illegal business practices.

We continue to engage now in the regulation-making phase under the act with stakeholders and consumers to ensure consumers are protected and we embrace the—

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

Supplementary question.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you to the minister for his response and his tireless work within his ministry.

I'm so glad to see that our government is taking the necessary steps to stop bad actors from taking advantage of our hard-working Ontarians through unfair business practices. By updating these rules that protect consumers when they're shopping or entering contracts with businesses, we're ensuring that Ontario is a better-adapted place for today's marketplace.

Speaker, I've heard of instances where notices of security interests, or NOSIs, have been used fraudulently against unsuspecting consumers. In many cases, scammers are deliberately targeting the most vulnerable members of our province, including seniors, by registering these NOSIs on properties without their knowledge. This is absolutely unacceptable and our government must do everything that we can do to address consumer harms in all its forms.

Speaker, could the minister please tell the House how our government will protect the people of Ontario from these harmful and fraudulent uses of NOSIs?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for Thornhill for that very specific question. I want to be very clear: This government has no tolerance for bad actors who fraudulently make money off the backs of our elderly and vulnerable citizens. So we have a very simple message, Mr. Speaker: Help is on the way.

Back in October, my ministry launched consultations seeking public input on ways to reduce the harmful and fraudulent use of NOSIs. Now I am proud to announce to this House that our government intends to table legislation that, if passed, will retrospectively ban all residential NOSIs in the land registry system. This is a monumental step, not only for Ontario but for Canada, for Ontario has taken the lead on this. Unlike the NDP's limited understanding of this issue, the misuse of NOSIs has evolved beyond the HVAC industry and has even been used on items as small as camera doorbells.

Doing nothing is not an option. We will take action. Stay tuned for this legislation this spring.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The teacher shortage in our education system is causing chaos for students, families and workers. The government created this problem with its cuts to education, its wage suppression bill and its disrespect for teachers. We now have thousands of teachers leaving the sector, many of them not waiting for the end of the school year, because of the working conditions.

Instead of big words and band-aid solutions, will the Minister of Education actually solve the problem by significantly investing in education and providing every child with the support they need?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, every single voice in the education system is on the same page here, with the exception, apparently, of the New Democrats, Liberals and teacher unions who opposed a common-sense recommendation supported by every principals' association, supported by every trustees' association, supported by common-sense families who want experienced retired educators to be at the front of the class to fix short-term absentee issues.

We have educators in this province, on average, taking 16 days off in the 184 days of work. We have a problem, and we have a solution in the short term: Use experienced retirees. Everyone's on the same page, but the teachers' unions—of course supported by the NDP, who are ill prepared to stand up for kids; they're always prepared to stand up for the special interests. Why not advance a simple request of ensuring we can leverage retirees to keep qualified educators at the front of class?

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Perhaps if the minister actually spoke to teachers instead of doing policy by press release, we would have an actual solution in place by now.

School boards have already had to cut teacher and education worker positions because of this government's underfunding, and now they're looking at even more cuts this year. The Toronto District School Board has to cut \$20.8 million. Peel announced they're closing special education classes and laying off teachers. This government's underfunding is pouring gasoline on the fire of the teacher shortage. If the minister wants to address the problem, why not start with adequate funding for education?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, in addition to hiring 3,000 more educators since our Premier and government were elected in 2018, in addition to cutting certification timelines for new educators by 50% and revoking the regressive Liberal regulation 274 that ensured hiring was held up in bureaucracy based on seniority instead of the merit of the individual—we did all of that without the support of opposition members.

Today we have put forth a simple request to leverage experienced educators to fill short-term absences, and the opposition have affirmed today that they oppose a common-sense provision that every principals' association, every trustees' association, English and French, Catholic and public—we are all on the same page, except for the opposition. They're going to have to explain to parents why they would rather protect pension entitlements instead of advancing quality, consistent in-person learning for every child in this province.

TAXATION

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Solicitor General. It is clear to everyone but the federal Liberals and their provincial counterparts that the carbon tax is hurting Ontario families and businesses. It is not only driving up the cost of goods, but it is also driving up the cost of fuel and gasoline for everyone in our province.

I've heard from people in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora who are concerned about the effects of the carbon tax on the public safety system. They want to ensure the police and firefighters who keep their communities safe are not being impacted by this regressive tax.

Speaker, can the Solicitor General please explain the consequences of the federal carbon tax on our province's public safety system?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank the member from Newmarket–Aurora, and she's right. Last weekend, I knocked on doors in my riding, and I listened to the business owners who are so concerned about public safety. You know, Mr. Speaker, Bonnie Crombie served on the board of the Peel regional police service board. She knows first-hand that there are no exemptions. Nobody is exempted, from police or fire or anybody in Ontario, to avoid paying the carbon tax. Every vehicle that is fuelled up pays the tax.

Mr. Speaker, it's obvious people in Ontario demand public safety. They have a right to feel safe in their own homes and communities and watch their kids go to school safely. What we don't need is a tax that penalizes those

that keep us safe. The Liberals can help today. Pick up the phone and say, “Cancel that tax.”

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the Solicitor General for the response. Unlike the opposition NDP and independent Liberals, our government takes public safety seriously. That’s exactly why we continue to call for an end to this carbon tax.

People in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora are concerned about the rising levels of crime in our province, including in my riding. They want to see police services have the support and resources they need to protect their communities and my community instead of paying an additional fuel cost because of the carbon tax. The people of Ontario have spoken time and time again. The federal government must eliminate the carbon tax now.

1150

Speaker, can the Solicitor General please explain further on the negative impacts of the carbon tax on law enforcement and public safety agencies across Ontario?

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to again thank the member opposite. The carbon tax, which most people don’t understand, affects public safety. Ontarians have demanded that they have a right to feel safe in their communities, and this government, under Premier Ford, has made it a priority. But when we have, as an example, the OPP spending over \$4 million a year, unnecessarily, to pay the federal carbon tax, do the math on how many extra officers, boots on the ground, they could have.

Just this morning, I was in Peel, together with our great member for Mississauga—Malton. We were at the Auto Theft Summit. The chiefs told us that every cent is precious to fighting crime, to getting those violent and repeat offenders off our streets.

The carbon tax doesn’t help at all; it hurts. The Liberals can do something right away: They can call their leader, who can call the Prime Minister and say—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The minister will please take his seat.

Next question?

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. We have learned the Conservatives are failing to build affordable housing along the Ontario Line. Of the 13,000 homes scheduled to be built along the line, only 213 of them are required to be affordable.

My question is very simple: Can this government commit to building more affordable housing near transit?

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

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you to the member for the question. That is a member, though, that voted against building the Ontario Line in the first place—our transit plan back in 2019, which doesn’t just include the Ontario Line, but Eglinton West and Scarborough and Yonge North. We developed a transit-oriented communities program that does build housing around our transit, and we

are anticipating building 54,000 new homes for Ontarians on our subway lines.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: The minister simply didn’t answer the question.

Back to the Premier: Toronto has submitted over 104 requests to this government to require developers to build some affordable housing in big buildings near transit. The Conservatives have not approved any of these requests—not one of them. If the government had approved these requests when asked, we’d be on track to build 6,000 affordable homes. This is a massive wasted opportunity.

My question is very simple: When is this government going to require developers to build some affordable housing in big developments near transit?

Hon. Kinga Surma: Thank you to the member for the question, because by asking this question, I can then say that the member opposite didn’t even want to build subways in the first place, in the biggest city in the country—talking about traffic and congestion, but did not support subway expansion.

We are building the Ontario Line. Construction is under way. And as part of the Ontario Line construction, we are also building complete communities at our stations, which will include 54,000 new homes for residents in the city of Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I believe that concludes our question period for this morning.

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

The House recessed from 1154 to 1500.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for University–Rosedale has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the Minister of Infrastructure regarding building affordable housing near transit. This matter will be debated today following private members’ public business.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have with us in the Speaker’s gallery today a group of Franco-Ontarians who have been selected by an all-party panel of members to receive l’Ordre de la Pléiade, an internationally recognized medal of l’Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. These individuals are being recognized for their outstanding contributions to French-speaking communities across the province.

Nous avons aujourd’hui, dans la tribune du Président, un groupe de Franco-Ontariennes et de Franco-Ontariens qui ont été sélectionnés par un comité multipartite de parlementaires pour recevoir l’Ordre de la Pléiade. Ces personnalités sont reconnues pour leurs contributions exceptionnelles envers la francophonie ontarienne.

The recipients are; les lauréats sont les suivants : Ronald Bisson, Lise Bourgeois, Melinda Chartrand, Claudette Gleeson, Abel Maxwell et Denis Poirier. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislature and congratulating them for this important achievement. Félicitations.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Joining us in the members' gallery today is Mr. Dan VanderLelie. He's the zone 3 director of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association. Dan has been a firefighter for over 25 years and currently holds the rank of platoon chief with the Burlington fire department. He is also a member of the Burlington Professional Firefighters Association, where he has served as president for the past 18 years.

Dan, we thank you for your service and joining us today. Dan is here to support the tabling of my private member's bill for first reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

END THE PUBLIC FUNDING OF PARTISAN GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À METTRE FIN AU FINANCEMENT PUBLIC DE LA PUBLICITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE PARTISANE

Mr. Vanthof, on behalf of Ms. Stiles, moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 176, An Act to amend the Government Advertising Act, 2004 / Projet de loi 176, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2004 sur la publicité gouvernementale.

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 Timiskaming–Cochrane be pleased to explain his bill briefly?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's the End the Public Funding of Partisan Government Advertising Act, 2024. I will read the explanatory note.

The Building Ontario Up Act, 2015, made numerous amendments to the Government Advertising Act, 2004. Among amendments made were changes to the rules that apply when the Auditor General reviews government advertising. The bill amends the act to reverse those amendments, so that the act reads substantially as it did before the 2015 amendments.

TEST YOUR SMOKE ALARM DAY ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR LA JOURNÉE DU TEST DES AVERTISSEURS DE FUMÉE

Mr. Yakabuski moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 177, An Act to proclaim Test Your Smoke Alarm Day / Projet de loi 177, Loi proclamant la Journée du test des avertisseurs de fumée.

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 like to briefly explain his bill?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The bill proclaims September 28 in each year as Test Your Smoke Alarm Day.

TAXATION AMENDMENT ACT (PROMOTING LEISURE ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH), 2024

LOI DE 2024 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES IMPÔTS (PROMOTION DES ACTIVITÉS DE LOISIR POUR LES JEUNES)

Mr. Blais moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 178, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to provide for a non-refundable tax credit to encourage children's extra-curricular activities / Projet de loi 178, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts pour prévoir un crédit d'impôt non remboursable afin d'encourager les activités parascolaires des enfants.

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 like to briefly explain his bill?

Mr. Stephen Blais: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The bill, the Promoting Leisure Activities for Youth act, or PLAY, would provide for a \$1,000 non-refundable tax credit for children's youth activities in sports and other extracurriculars.

PETITIONS

LÉGISLATION PORTANT SUR LE TRAVAIL

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais remercier M^{me} Nicole Sabourin de Hanmer dans mon comté pour ces pétitions.

« Loi concernant les briseurs de grève.

« Alors que les grèves et les lock-out sont rares : en moyenne, 97 % des conventions collectives sont négociées sans interruption de travail; et

« Alors que des lois contre les travailleurs et travailleuses de remplacement existent au Québec depuis 1978, en Colombie-Britannique depuis 1993 et en Ontario sous le gouvernement néo-démocrate, la loi a été renversée par le gouvernement conservateur de M. Harris; et

« Alors que les lois anti-briseurs de grève ont permis de réduire la durée et les dissensions des conflits du travail; et

« Alors que le recours à des briseurs de grève pendant une grève ou un lock-out est préjudiciable au tissu social d'une communauté à court et à long terme, ainsi qu'au bien-être des résidents et résidentes; »

Ils et elles demandent à « l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario d'adopter le projet de loi concernant les briseurs de grève afin d'interdire le recours à des travailleurs et travailleuses de remplacement lors d'une grève ou d'un lock-out. »

J'appuie cette pétition. Je vais la signer, et je demande à Reyan de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to thank Lindsay from my home township of Douro-Dummer for the work on this petition.

“Whereas the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was created in 1962 as an agency for the province of Ontario, accountable to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; and

“Whereas the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario last received major amendments in the 1990s and these amendments focused on formalizing the operational structure of the agency; and

“Whereas in 1962 when the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was created robotics used in agriculture was not a technology that was even envisioned; and

“Whereas advancements in robotics for dairy farms has resulted in dairy farmers in Ontario having a competitive advantage by producing more milk with a smaller herd of cattle; and

1510

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would allow for more research to occur in this new technology; and

“Whereas in 1962 when the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was created genomics was not a technology that was envisioned as something that could be used in the agriculture and food industry; and

“Whereas agricultural genomics is a rich field that contributes to advances in crop development to assist Ontario farmers in producing some of the highest-quality crops available in the entire world; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would allow for more advanced genomic studies to occur in Ontario to ensure that Ontario farmers have access to this technology; and

“Whereas in 1962 when the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario was created autonomous vehicle technology did not exist and therefore was not a focus of any research in Ontario; and

“Whereas autonomous vehicle technology has seen advancements in tractors, drones, seed planting, weeding and harvesting robots and are several of the technologies currently under development that will transform agriculture and help alleviate food shortages by improving

sustainability and productivity of agricultural activities; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act will help facilitate further research in autonomous vehicle technologies in Ontario so that Ontario can get that research out of the lab and into the field more quickly; and

“Whereas in 1962 when the Agriculture Research Institute of Ontario was created, artificial intelligence was not a technology that existed; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario will be able to enhance this invaluable research into technologies that can help explore the soil health to collect insights, monitor weather conditions and recommend the appropriate application of fertilizers and pesticides to ensure maximum crop yields and reducing the amount of waste created by over-fertilizing or applying the inappropriate amount of pesticide to a crop; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act is a key component of the Grow Ontario Strategy that aims to strengthen Ontario's agriculture and food supply chain; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act also aims to increase agri-food technology and adoption; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act also aims to attract and grow Ontario's agri-food talent; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario would further its status as a world leader in agriculture; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario would help the development of the industry's unique technologies; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario would increase its competitiveness and productivity in the agriculture and food industry; and

“Whereas by modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act, Ontario would help in the development and adoption of new technologies in the agriculture and food industry in support of the key goals set out in the Grow Ontario Strategy; and

“Whereas the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario owns 14 research stations across the province that provide industry with the latest in agricultural and food-specific research; and

“Whereas Ontario needs to take action to strengthen the agriculture industry by proposing to amend the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act by expanding the current scope of research to be more relevant today and serve the future needs of the entire agricultural and food value chain; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would allow research in Ontario to move at the speed of business; and

“Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would allow for the results of the

research to be distributed to Ontario's agricultural and food industries in a more accessible way; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide appropriate information directly to the fingertips of the farmers of Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on aquaculture being performed at the research institute located in Alma, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on equine, poultry and swine being performed at the research institute located in Arkell, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on vegetables being performed at the research institute located in Bradford, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on horticulture crops being performed at the research institute located in Cedar Springs, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on beef, dairy and swine being performed at the research institute located in Elora, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Elora, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Emo, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Huron, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on beef, field crops and horticulture crops being performed at the research institute located in New Liskeard, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on general animal facilities and sheep being performed at the research institute located in Ponsonby, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Ridgetown, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on horticulture crops being performed at the research institute located in Simcoe, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to

the research focused on horticulture crops being performed at the research institute located in Vineland, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Winchester, Ontario; and

"Whereas modernizing the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Act would provide a direct benefit to the research focused on field crops being performed at the research institute located in Woodstock, Ontario;

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

"To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fully support and endorse Bill 155, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario Amendment Act, 2024, introduced by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs on November 27, 2023," which has already gone through second reading and committee and has been referred back to the chamber for third reading.

1520

I fully endorse this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to page Tyler.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It is my honour to present the following petitions on behalf of Dr. Sally Palmer, chair of the Hamilton Social Work Action Committee.

"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 \$1,308 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 small increases to ODSP have still left these citizens below the poverty line. Both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to survive at this time of alarming 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 citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP."

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

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore 24/7 urgent care services at the Fort Erie and Port Colborne hospitals:

“Whereas it is within the legislated powers of the Minister of Health and Ontario Health to require public hospitals to provide particular services and the level of those services;

“Whereas the Niagara Health System has closed the urgent care centres at the Douglas Memorial Hospital and at the Port Colborne Hospital from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m.;

“Whereas the Welland Hospital has also had recent service cuts resulting in no emergent and urgent care from 4 p.m. to 8 a.m. Monday to Friday and none on the weekends;

“Whereas these cuts and closures result in poor or no access to urgent care for more than 100,000 people in south Niagara overnight;

“Whereas more than 20,000 people living in Fort Erie, Port Colborne and southeast Wainfleet do not have a family doctor;

“Whereas there is limited taxi service and none at night and no public transit services at night. These, combined with increased travel time and long waits in the emergency departments of the remaining hospitals in north Niagara, mean that residents from Fort Erie, Port Colborne and the southeast region of Wainfleet face serious health risks due to the time to get medical help at the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls hospitals, as well as financial hardship;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to immediately work with Niagara Health to restore the urgent and emergent care services in the NHS hospitals in south Niagara to operate 24/7.”

I fully support this petition. I will sign my name to it and send it with page Anne to the table.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon.

I should perhaps remind members that, while we have had a long-standing practice of allowing members to read petitions verbatim, another alternative is to summarize the petition more briefly than that if they choose to do so, but they can't do both.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have with us in the Legislature today a special guest. He's a former member of provincial Parliament, who represented the people of Scarborough East in the 36th and 37th provincial Parliaments: Steve Gilchrist.

Welcome back, Mr. Gilchrist. It's great to have you here.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL CARE FOR ANIMALS ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DES SOINS PROFESSIONNELS PRODIGUÉS AUX ANIMAUX

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 20, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act to enact the Veterinarian Professionals Act, 2024 and amend or repeal various acts / Projet de loi 171, Loi visant à édicter la Loi de 2024 sur les professionnels vétérinaires et à modifier ou à abroger diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): When we last debated Bill 171, the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane had the floor, and I believe he has some time left.

M. John Vanthof: Bon après-midi, monsieur le Président. Je vais commencer mon discours en souhaitant à tout le monde une bonne journée de la Francophonie.

Beaucoup de personnes ne savent pas que je peux parler français. Je peux comprendre tout, mais c'est très difficile pour moi de parler français sans bière. Malheureusement, aujourd'hui, je n'ai pas bu de bière, so je vais continuer de parler en anglais. Merci beaucoup.

I had a few minutes this morning to start the opposition's response to the debate on Bill 171. I would like to commend the member from Peterborough. That petition was almost longer than the whole debate on the ARIO Act. Just to clarify, we are all in favour of that act, and we hope that it goes through the Legislature as quickly as possible.

This is also an agriculture bill, An Act to enact the Veterinary Professionals Act, 2024 and amend or repeal various acts. Basically what this act is doing is replacing the veterinary act of 1989. I said this morning that we are also in favour of this. The veterinary act needed renewal. We have many things to oppose this government on. They have made many mistakes, some grave ones. They have had to rescind many pieces of legislation. I think they hold the record on rescinding legislation.

But they have, on this act—and I said it this morning—at least on this act, which we support, they did full consultations. They took this piece of legislation seriously, and I commend them for it. That's one of the reasons why we are supportive.

And veterinarians and vet techs—because this act also recognizes vet techs as a registered profession, and that's very important. I've been a farmer my whole life and none of my neighbours would ever consider me a vet tech. They would never, never, never—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Nor will I, John.

Mr. John Vanthof: No.

I'm trying to find a way to say this. I said it this morning: Veterinarians play a key role not only with companion animals, with service animals—the minister herself mentioned service animals this morning, and that was a good thing to talk about—and livestock and exotic animals. There are exotic animals in the province as well. But the relationship between the vet and the animal and the caretaker or the owner is different with the different types of animals. Anyone who owns an animal wants to take care of it, has not only a respect for it but certainly a love, in many cases. But the relationship between a companion animal and an animal that's farm livestock and a vet and the owner is different. I know that because our families had both for many years.

The working conditions for veterinarians and vet techs are also different in many cases for livestock and for small

animals, companion animals. I think that's one of the reasons that we are facing in this province a shortage of veterinarians across the board, but that shortage is more pronounced in rural Ontario and even more pronounced in northern Ontario. And that can have grave consequences.

Now, this act itself does not address that, but I think to have a good conversation about veterinary medicine in the province, you need to think about that. This act basically sets out the parameters of how veterinarians and vet techs are to be regulated, to make sure that they perform at a certain quality level, that they have an administration body to ensure that their members perform at a certain quality level. That's very important. It's important in all jobs but certainly when you're dealing with living things, it's incredibly important. That's basically what this act does. It helps the animals that are in the care of the veterinarians—it improves their care.

1530

But if you're going to talk about improving the care of any type of animal in the province, you will also have to think about how there need to be enough vets, because lack of access to a veterinarian or a vet technician also impacts the health of the animal, as it does with our current human health care system. We have a lack of doctors. There are 22.2 million people in Ontario who don't have access to a primary care doctor—

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's 2.2 million.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, 2.2 million.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's 2.3 million now.

Mr. John Vanthof: Anyway, it's over two million—and that has an impact on people's health. It does, because if you don't have access to a family doctor, diagnosis isn't as quick. Because you don't have regular access, sometimes you might let something go.

I'm not trying to compare the two directly, but I know, on our farm—I like talking about farming; it's one of the few things I have a lot of experience in—we had a very good relationship with several vets. Over my 35-year career, that relationship changed. When I started farming, vets were mainly ER vets. If there was a bad calving, if there was something we couldn't handle ourselves, we called the vet. But as my farm, and I think as agriculture progressed—but I'm using my farm as an example, a dairy farm—as we got better at our craft and as our animals started producing more, we started using the vets a lot more in a consultative and preventative medicine role.

Once, on our farm, we milked 70 cows, which is a normal-sized dairy farm—it's a little bit below average; right now I think it's a little bit higher, but we had 140 animals altogether—we got the vet once a month on a regularly scheduled visit simply to do herd health. That took half a day a month, to check the cows: the ones that should be in calf, the ones that needed a postpartum check, to make sure their vaccines were up to date, check the growth curves on the calves, check the feed formulations. On modern farms, the feed, what we feed cattle—and that goes for all livestock; I know cattle, so I'm going to stick to cattle, but it goes for all livestock—it's very carefully formulated, what you feed. That was a scheduled visit. We

would book that six months or a year ahead. We would know what times we would be busy harvesting crops, and we'd know what times we wouldn't be, and that's when we scheduled them. It was much easier to get a vet to do that. It's preventative—and not just preventative, but a productive relationship is always more beneficial for everyone involved.

But there's also the other part of being a large animal vet—and a small animal vet, same thing, because if an accident happens to a small animal late at night, that has to be treated right away—we still had emergency vet calls, primarily when a cow was having a calf. I have delivered—and we have delivered—many calves over my lifetime, but sometimes something happens that is beyond the farmer's capability. So we call the vet. That can be at 3 o'clock in the morning—often, calvings don't happen at 10:30 in the morning; the difficult ones never happen at 10:30 in the morning—and then it's much harder to get a vet.

We were very fortunate where I live. In the New Liskeard area in the district of Timiskaming, we've always had access to enough vets. It's a hub of agriculture and we serve many other parts of northern Ontario, both equipment-wise—we've always been very fortunate. But there are many parts of northern Ontario where the vet is not coming or the vet won't be able to come until the next day. In that case, the animal—in ultimate severe cases, the animal might have to be euthanized.

That's why it's so important that we have universal access to veterinarians as much as possible. It's at a crisis, as it is in human health care. Veterinary access is in crisis proportions, particularly in livestock medicine because many vets now who are trained go to small animal. The working conditions, in many cases, are better, and I am not criticizing anyone for their career choices. Anyone who goes into veterinary medicine, whether as a veterinarian or as a vet tech, it's a calling and it's a tough job, because to do that job, you have to love animals and you are going to lose animals.

I'm sure almost all of us have lost a pet. We know what that feels like. Every farmer has lost whatever type of animal they raise. It's not quite the same as a pet, but it's close. It can't be quite the same as a pet because it's your job, so you have to have a little bit of a wall, but you still feel it. If you're a vet or a vet tech, you feel that a lot, because you get into the profession to make animals healthier. I don't think anyone gets into the profession of veterinary medicine without a love for animals. I don't think so.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And they also see cruelty.

Mr. John Vanthof: The member from Waterloo said that vets also see cruelty. Yes, and vets also play a role in regulating that. At livestock auctions, vets are there, and if an animal is there that shouldn't be sold, the vet will step in. It's not always particularly—you brought me on a tangent, the member from Waterloo, but it's really important so I want to go off on that tangent for a second.

There are cases where animals face cruel treatment. In many cases, not all, it has to do with mental health issues

with their caretakers. Mental health wellness for farmers—and not just for farmers—is also in crisis. When the farmer or the farm family is facing mental health issues, often the animals suffer. I'd like to thank the member for Waterloo for bringing that up. It wasn't part of my presentation, but I'm glad that we're talking about that, because it is a vital role that vets play.

There's a reality show about vets. Some of you might have heard of this show—

Mr. Mike Harris: Dr. Pol.

Mr. John Vanthof: Dr. Pol. I'm not a big fan of reality shows, because a lot of them, I don't think there's much reality involved, but on Dr. Pol—honestly, I didn't watch much of Dr. Pol because I've lived most of it—a lot of the situations there are real, and watching it is different than being there.

Just as an example—I am not going to spend an hour talking about agriculture and vets without at least having one or two cow stories.

1540

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, at least one.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, because I usually put one or two cow stories in if I'm not talking about agriculture.

There are some common ailments that specifically dairy cows, but all cows can get. Cows have four stomachs, but dairy cows are very prone—because dairy cows are athletes. Dairy cows are athletes. They work very hard. They are attended very well, but they work very hard, and if something goes off balance, they just don't have a bad day and come back—not often.

One of the things that afflicts dairy cattle—and it's also partly if you get the feed wrong. There are a couple of things. One of them is called milk fever. When a cow has a calf and they start—and if there are any vets watching this, they're going to cringe, because my description of how a cow works inside probably isn't accurate at all. But from a farmer's perspective, how a cow works is, a cow has a calf and its mammary glands demand calcium, and if there's a bit of an imbalance, it takes the calcium from its muscles and it gets something called milk fever. It can't stand up. You can feel them get cold. Everyone has a different way of handling it. I wasn't very good at intravenous, so I didn't do it, so we put bottles of calcium under their skin, and that would hold them until the vet came and did intravenous calcium. Most of the time, the cow would get up, but—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Not always.

Mr. John Vanthof: Not always.

Something else that cattle are very prone to, especially if they get milk fever—and I hope the vets give me some latitude here—is twisted stomachs. I hope no one in the Legislature has ever talked about cows' twisted stomachs before, but I'm—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Precedent-setting.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay. Cows have four stomachs, and often it's the second one that twists. What happens if they're not eating enough is the stomach will get, in my humble way, empty and will kind of knot itself. When it knots itself, you have to get that knot undone, or the cow

is either going to die or you're going to have to euthanize it.

When I first started farming, the vet would—and you couldn't tell right away if a cow had a twisted stomach, but you can tell on their faces when they're not happy, and their ears are cold. As soon as you see ears cold, you know you have to start checking your cow out.

Ms. Catherine Fife: That's the same as me.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. The vet would come, and my first vet froze the cow's flank and did an incision, and he would manually twist the stomach around and sew it to the bottom of the cow's abdomen, and then do it up, stitch it up. It would take some babying to get that cow to come back, and they didn't all come back.

Every farmer had his own something that gets cows' stomachs activated. It doesn't just activate my French; it also activates a cow's stomach: beer. Very strong coffee does, too. If you mix really strong coffee and—I don't think Hansard will cover hand motions, but you put your arm around the cow, hold their nose up and—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Give them a beer?

Mr. John Vanthof: Give them a beer. After a couple of beers, after they do it for one or two, you no longer have to hold them up. The smart cows are just waiting for it, and when they start doing that, that's when I start drinking the beer, because they don't need it anymore.

Laughter.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's actually not true.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay, everybody's got to admit this is more interesting than that petition was.

My first vet, Dr. Pierce, retired, and then I went to the Temiskaming vet clinic, and they did it differently. So, when we had a cow with a turned stomach, there's a way to tie a rope right behind their front legs. If you tie it tight enough, the cow will fall on its side and then you tie the four legs, so the cow is lying prone in the pen.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I don't know.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. And then, with a stethoscope, the vet, he or she—Connie Dancho was my last vet, and she did the same thing—and they will hear—because by flipping the cow upside down, the stomach will go back to where it's supposed to.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Could you demonstrate?

Mr. John Vanthof: John, I need someone to demonstrate on here.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I volunteer you.

Mr. John Vanthof: Dairy cows and yaks, they're close.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Dairy cows and yaks are close?

Mr. John Vanthof: He's the closest we have.

Anyway, you flip the cow over and then the stomach will go naturally to where it's supposed to.

They have four stomachs but it's only the second stomach that causes the trouble. I hope it's the second stomach; I'm sure a vet will text me and say no, it's the third or fourth. But anyway, I always thought it was the second.

Then, when they feel that the stomach is in the right place, when they hear it, then they will sew the stomach back in place from the outside, and it's much less invasive. The cow bounces back much quicker. But it's not as—how do I put it? It's a skill to be able to do that. Some have a better knack at it than others; it's just a skill. It's just like Yak is a great speaker and some of us aren't, right? It's a skill. Anyway, it's much less invasive.

By the same token, if you don't have access to a vet, that cow is not going to make it, right? And even if you do preventive—and all farmers now do, regardless of what type of livestock you have. I'm pretty sure all farmers do regular herd health.

The ARIO Act had committee hearings. Yak, you were there.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was there?

Mr. John Vanthof: You were there.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I slept through most of it.

Mr. John Vanthof: He did sleep through most of it.

But Mark Reusser was there from the OFA, and he mentioned something about vets. He's a turkey farmer, and each time he gets a new flock, he also gets the vet to make sure that the birds are healthy. It's kind of the same principle.

So it's really important that everyone has access, that all livestock farmers—and all companion-animal people too, but for livestock farmers, it's not only their business, but also, livestock is much harder to move. If you take my example of the cow with the turned stomach, if the nearest vet is 400 miles away—in my case, Cochrane is in the north of my riding; it's about a three-hour drive for me to go from where I live to the north tip, and that's the closest vet. So it's a long trip for a sick cow and the chances of survival are less. Also, you're trucking that cow back while it's still in a frail state.

They are looking at ways to be able to do this because it's a fact of life: We don't have enough vets. We talk about this on all sides of the House: Animal agriculture is expanding in northern Ontario, but the vets haven't. Because we've got a shortage of vets, it's harder to get them. I give credit where credit is due: The government has created a program—I believe vets get \$50,000 over five years. I think that makes sense.

1550

Another thing that's just happened is—I talked about this in my first session on this bill but we'll talk about it a little bit again—again, similar to human health care, it's harder to get doctors in remote areas, so it's harder to get vets in remote areas. Where I live, close to New Liskeard, Temiskaming Shores, I don't consider it remote, but other people maybe would. For years, we've had the Northern Ontario School of Medicine so that we get people who grew up in rural Ontario, grew up in northern Ontario, go to medical school, know how great a place it is to live, and it's easier to not only attract them but to retain them, because they're used to that, the lifestyle that we love so much.

With vets, it's the same thing. A program has been created that you can do your first couple of years of

veterinary school at Lakehead in Thunder Bay and then go to the University of Guelph, which is the veterinary school of Ontario where all of our vets are trained. But having a campus in Thunder Bay will attract people, hopefully, as the Northern Ontario School of Medicine does, from northern Ontario or from rural Ontario. And hopefully they will be more attracted to large animal agriculture than people who, if you've never been exposed to large animal agriculture—you love animals and you get trained to be a vet—it's a bigger transition. If you're used to small animals, great, but if the only exposure you've had to large animals is through the veterinary course, there's less of a chance of you becoming a large animal vet.

I mentioned this this morning, too, and I think it's worthy of mentioning again: To become a vet, to get into vet school, it's really tough. Now, I was a farmer my whole life, but you know what? I never would have had the grades or the smarts to be a vet—ever. I love animals, but it's really, really, really tough. I said this morning I don't think the bar needs to be lowered, but it needs to be shifted. I don't know exactly how to say this—and I've talked to lots of people about this in the farm world—we have to somehow also take the lived experience into account.

So an example—I always use personal experiences, but I hope that I can relate to people by using personal experiences: My kids didn't want to be vets, and I'm not sure—some of my kids might have had the grades to make it; they didn't get it from me, but they got some brains—but my kids did see all these things happening. My kids helped with cows with twisted stomachs. My kids helped cows calve. They did all these things. So they have a lived experience that some others might not have. And by the same token, I'm sure there are people who have lived experience with small animals that my kids didn't have. But if we're looking for large animal vets, we have to, over the long term, take that lived experience into account. It's a bit like this place, right? Lived experience should count, and I think it does.

I'm really going on a tangent now, but one of the great things about this place that I didn't realize—when I got elected here, I assumed that everyone else was going to be a lawyer or a poli sci grad. I've got nothing against lawyers and poli sci grads. I've got a daughter who's a lawyer.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: And our two different styles reflect that. You're very researched; you know what you're talking about—and me, maybe not so much.

What I have learned about this place is, all our past experiences add to this place—the lived experience, right? The member from Peterborough is nodding. There are things that we've all done in our past—that we know something that you didn't learn in school. That's important. And in veterinary medicine, we need to look at that, too.

I'd like to switch, because I think I've covered the vet part—I might go back to it, but I've got a few more cow stories if I run out of time.

Another important part of this bill is the vet tech part. Vet techs are going to be a regulated profession. As

veterinary medicine gets much more advanced, much more technical, and as we continue with a shortage of vets, there are many things that a vet tech can do very well; in some cases, maybe not as well as the vet, but maybe better than—and I'm going to again use myself as an example—the livestock owner. But we have to be sure that they're actually capable, trained to do that, and having them as a registered profession, I think, is a step forward.

I'll go back to my cow analogy. As I just said, I could never—and I tried it; I am no good at intravenous. I just can't do intravenous on a cow; I just can't find the vein, but a vet tech could. So if we can't get the vet, if the vet is doing something that only the vet can do—a very difficult calving or something—or if there's a disease outbreak and we need the vet's not only institutional knowledge but practical knowledge to deal with that, then maybe the vet tech can handle my cow with milk fever. That's really important.

I don't want to cause a feud between vets and vet techs, because they work together. They're also—we hear this a lot from both sides: an interdisciplinary team. Well, that's vets and vet techs, too. It's really important.

Actually, one of my staff is a trained vet tech. It's very interesting, talking to her, because of her lived experience. Cathy Pfeifer is her name. I hope I don't get in big trouble for saying this, but one of the reasons that makes her great at being a constituency assistant—one of the things that I didn't realize was so hard about being a vet tech is the personal part. I focused on large animal vets, but if you think about small animals, companion animals, they're part of your family. If grave decisions have to be made, or if very grave things are going to happen regardless of what you do, it's the same as losing any other family member.

1600

Vets deal with that too, but vet techs deal with that a lot. If you think about that, that is really, really tough, the social part of that. They deal with people whose—if your companion animal, your dog, your cat has a disease or is hit by something or attacked by a coyote, it's all-consuming. That falls on the vet tech.

If you think about that—I never really fully until I talked to Cathy. She's really good at talking to people, and it comes really naturally to her. I didn't really clue in to why until she started talking about being a vet tech and that actually, in some ways, a constituency assistant was almost easier than a vet tech. And that's saying something, because we all have people in our offices who do intake, who do—I can't speak for other offices; I'll speak for mine. My staff does the majority of the casework. They know more about most things than I do, and they take the toughest stuff. They get it first.

How I learned that—I'm going to go off on another tangent since nobody has done a section 23 on me yet. When I—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Aw, come on. Otherwise, I'll start reading petitions. I'll steal Dave's.

Probably one of the best lessons I ever learned with this job is when I was first successful at running. We took over

from another party, so we had no staff for a month and a half or so. My wife and I answered phones two or three days a week—

Ms. Catherine Fife: And still married. That's great.

Mr. John Vanthof: Well, my wife, who I love dearly—after a few days, Ria said, “You know what? Milking cows is looking easier and easier. You're on your own.” And then I was answering phones. But that was an incredible education, because then you know.

I'm assuming in a rural riding like mine—I don't think it's much different, but often, our offices are the last stop. If people don't know what to do, where to go, and even if it's not a provincial responsibility, even if there's nothing we can do about it, they call, and they want to talk to somebody. That's tough—

Ms. Catherine Fife: They want to be heard.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, they want to be heard. That's tough. I never would have realized how tough that is if I hadn't had to do it for a couple of months myself first. I wouldn't have. Maybe over the years, I would have realized the breadth of this job. But those first couple of months, when I got off the farm and I had to start answering phones and listening, that's when I learned. I didn't know about the Family Responsibility Office. I didn't know much about ODSP either, to tell you the truth. There were all kinds of things I didn't—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Birth certificates, no?

Mr. John Vanthof: No, no. I didn't realize that was a provincial responsibility. I really learned.

Anyway, I really went off on a tangent there. Getting back to the act, like I said this morning, we are going to support it. Like I said this morning, when an act contains—when it's about issues that are compatible, when there are no poison pills in it, when there's no—and we might vote against other acts that we are philosophically opposed to. But it's often frustrating when the government puts many things which we are in favour of and then puts one or two things we absolutely cannot support, and then you can run around and say we voted against hospitals because you put crazy things in a budget bill which we can't support. And we know how that game is played, but that's what you are doing. To the minister's credit and the ministry's credit, they didn't do it with this one.

But we do have a couple of questions because we also did consultation ourselves on this. And, as what we should do when you do consultation to find out what the stakeholders feel, and if there is anything that can be improved—and when we did our consultation on this, on the bill, we didn't get a lot of—and that's why I feel comfortable saying the government did a good job consulting. Not everyone was 100% on board but everyone thought it was not just an incremental step forward but it needed to be done.

But there are a couple of questions, and I asked the parliamentary assistant this morning. This is basically a regulatory act, so it talks about the college of veterinarians; it talks about regulating vet techs; and it's very prescriptive on what a veterinarian can be called. So, “Unless otherwise permitted by the regulations, no person

other than a veterinarian member shall use the title ‘veterinarian’, ‘veterinary surgeon’ or ‘doctor’ or variations, abbreviations, abbreviations of variations or equivalents in another language, while engaged in the practice of veterinary medicine.” And then veterinary technician members. But it has an exception—chiropractors—and that kind of stuck out to me.

Now, I’m sure that there are chiropractors. We never use a chiropractor on a dairy farm, but I’m sure—I’m not the saying that chiropractic medicine shouldn’t be a part of veterinary medicine. But I don’t think the College of Chiropractors of Ontario covers veterinary medicine. So I asked this morning why there is a carve-out for chiropractors. With some of the stakeholders, that’s one of the issues that came up. Why?

And also, if there is a carve-out for chiropractors, so a chiropractor can call themselves a doctor under this act—and it just kind of stuck out. So we’re hoping that when this bill goes to committee, we have an answer to that. It comes up a couple of times.

So it’s very prescriptive for what authorized activities can be of both the vets and of the vet techs. There’s part III of the bill, which is “Authorized activities, risk of harm and restricted titles”, and it lays out what the members can do and what conditions they can treat. It’s very prescriptive, as it should be, under the college of physicians—it’s the college of veterinary medicine, but as it is with physicians, because it also lays out very strict rules, very strict processes if someone with a veterinary license doesn’t live up to the standards of the college of what the penalties could be.

It’s very prescriptive, as it should be, but there’s a carve-out for chiropractors. Again, I’m not criticizing; it very well could be legitimate, but it just doesn’t seem to fit. Some in the college of veterinary medicine also raised that concern, that something just doesn’t fit with the rest. That’s actually one of the bigger concerns. Perhaps we can flesh that out as we go forward.

1610

I hate to give too many compliments to the government—and I don’t give compliments at all—but this act is an example of the way legislation should work. When it’s time to update something, you consult it widely, you bring it to the Legislature and have good debate about it, you talk about the issues themselves and, hopefully, at the end of the day, the people of Ontario are better served and in this case, also, animals in Ontario are better served. For most things we talk only about people, but this act is also about animals. And animals, to many people, are as important—or more important—than people. In many cases animals play a huge role in our lives.

I’ve got five minutes left. What am I going to do in five minutes?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Tell another cow story.

Mr. John Vanthof: I have some cow stories, but not all of them—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: What if someone’s a bad vet?

Mr. John Vanthof: To the member from Oshawa, that is in the bill. There is a process that, if it’s felt that a vet is

not living up to the standards of their profession, there is a process in this bill that the vet can be fined or sanctioned. That’s really important because the one thing I know, on the farm, when you call the vet, you expect—and we were very lucky because in my history, we’ve always had great vets. They were professional. They were part of our farm. But you expect that. You shouldn’t have to worry about that. And that’s where a college is really important.

That’s why the veterinary techs are now part of a regulated profession under this bill. That’s also very important, so that you know when someone has a designation they’ve had the training to actually be worthy of that designation. That’s really important. I said this at the start: This is a regulatory bill about regulating vets and regulating vet techs. That’s what this whole bill is about.

The minister talked about the importance of agriculture in Ontario. Those of us who are actually in the industry know the importance that veterinary medicine plays. Something I just noticed, at a glance, but something else veterinary medicine plays a very important role in is disease outbreaks. There are things like avian influenza, swine fever, BSE—mad cow disease, but it’s bovine—I’ll stick with mad cow disease. You need veterinary expertise to be able to understand and control—“control” is probably the wrong word, but—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, to be vigilant and to minimize—hopefully totally avoid, but minimize—outbreaks. Because disease outbreaks in animals are not only—they could be devastating to the greater population too, but they’re also devastating to the individual farm who goes through the outbreak.

I’m going to go back to something I’m the best at, and that’s talking about my own farm. I remember when I started farming and I took over my dad’s farm. Younger, more aggressive, I wanted to up the production in the cows, but I didn’t fully understand feed formulations as much as I should have and I had—we’ll go back to twisted stomachs—eight cows in a row. When I started milking, we milked 30, and when you have eight out of 30—I just about lost the farm, and it was my own management, right? Because I didn’t understand and, at that point, I didn’t have a good enough relationship either with my feed—

Hon. Rob Flack: Be careful. Be careful.

Mr. John Vanthof: I didn’t, no, no. Later on, I had a great relationship with Masterfeeds, later on, okay—or with the vet, right? And I learned that the hard way, but that can happen even when the management is perfect.

I’ll give you one last example, Speaker: Avian influenza is very—that’s not a cow disease; “avian,” that’s a bird disease. But we have wild birds flying around that also carry it, so that’s one of the reasons why many people are worried about backyard flocks of chickens, because they could be vectors for avian influenza. You don’t think about that, but they could be.

Anyway, I’ve only got a few seconds left, so I’d like to thank you very much for allowing me to speak for this long.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have to compliment the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane because, in reality, it's a lot easier to speak for an hour on a bill that you oppose than it is to speak on one that you actually support, because there's a whole lot more on a bill that you are opposing. And we are grateful that you are supporting this bill because we know it's a good piece of legislation. No piece of legislation is necessarily perfect, but this one does hit a lot of the right marks.

You talked a little about—well, no, you talked a lot about it; I'm only going to talk about it for a few seconds—the extension and the expansion of the powers and the authority of a veterinary technician. You're a rural member and you talked about the vastness of rural and northern Ontario. That change, what kind of real, positive impacts is that going to have for people who are in the practice of agriculture in your neck of the woods, in their ability to get veterinary help when it's needed?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for that question regarding the role that veterinary technicians can play, an increasing role in rural Ontario.

I covered it a bit in my speech, but when we're short of vets, or even if we're not, the veterinary technician can perform tasks that could, in emergency situations—or even in consultative situations, but certainly in emergency situations—save an animal's life. And that is a big step forward. It makes a big difference in rural Ontario if we can call and—I always go back to: It's similar to a doctor and nurse practitioner. It's very similar; very similar.

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

1620

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to compliment my colleague for his remarks. I think we have all in this chamber learned much more about dairy farming than we ever thought we would when we arrived in this place—

Mr. John Vanthof: Or wanted to.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Yes.

But the member knows that Ontarians everywhere are facing significant affordability challenges. The cost of veterinary care is a big barrier for low-income people in their ability to own pets. I want to give a shout-out to veterinarian Dr. Martha Harding, who has clinics in London, Kitchener and now Hamilton to serve low-income pet owners and those on social assistance.

So my question is, is there anything in this bill that will help facilitate the creation of more of these non-profit veterinary clinics that can help low-income people afford the cost of owning a pet?

Mr. John Vanthof: That, from my colleague, is actually a very good question. Access to veterinary medicine for small animals—large animals, as well, but for small animals—is at times very cost-prohibitive. There's nothing in this bill that will directly impact that, other than if vet techs are able to do more procedures, that might make some difference.

But there's nothing in this bill—it's a regulatory bill. It's not going to directly impact them. But it is a big concern.

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

Hon. Rob Flack: To the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane: I love your stories. Even more importantly, I love that you were a Masterfeeds customer for so many years; thank you for that.

I'll cut to the chase. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke said it best: I think a lot of this legislation has to do with expanding the scope for veterinary technicians, which I'll talk about in a few minutes. The vet act hasn't been changed for 35 years, so my question is, what do you see in the future that will need to take place as animal agriculture consolidates? We're going to need different types of vets. What do you see in the future, looking at dairy herds down the road? What are the needs going to be for veterinarians down the road, and/or veterinary technicians?

Mr. John Vanthof: That's a very good question. What I see is that more of the consultative work will be done by veterinarians, and the day-to-day work could be done more by vet techs.

I don't want to get all the veterinarians in the world mad at me, but now that we can do pregnancy checks with ultrasound, I think a vet tech could do that, someone trained—because we have AI technicians who breed cows, right? But a vet tech, someone with expertise, should be able to do pregnancy diagnosis very easily. I think that opens up more expertise for vets to look at disease reduction, increasing production. Animal health is going to be more and more important, and I think that will give more breadth to that.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I also sat enthralled for the last 52 minutes listening to the member tell us about the times before this Legislature. It's always interesting how we can connect our past lives with the work that we do in here, and important to draw from that experience, as he had talked about.

What we are hearing from our various communities is that there is a real lack of access to vets. We had heard about the cost, but also even vets being able to practise. And so some of what I imagine the government heard during consultation was ways to—I'll say “fast-track,” but I don't mean “skip steps”—for folks who are internationally trained or are coming and wanting to practise here. Is there anything in this bill that is going to help to speed up the process of getting more vets into the system who are wanting to practise here in the province?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, that's a very good question, and one that I might not be able to directly, credibly answer, but I'm going to try. I think that the structure that's being created by this bill will help. Because it's been updated, you know what the parameters are to be a vet tech or to be a vet. You don't have to wonder

if this is—and I think, although it's not directly in the bill, it certainly won't be a hindrance.

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

Mr. Trevor Jones: I really appreciate the commentary and the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane sharing his experience and also sharing some good questions—to question a good bill to make sure it's the best it can be.

Now, we talked about farmers being able to do routine, non-invasive procedures, and the fact that this bill safeguards that. Will the member agree that, within this proposed act, we are certainly enabling livestock farmers and even pet owners to perform those routine, non-invasive procedures, to safeguard that very important part of raising healthy livestock and pets?

Mr. John Vanthof: That's actually a very good question, because as a farmer—and my friends who are still farmers—it's very important that farmers don't have to call a vet for everything. But it's also very important, and I think this bill talks about this too, that, to do that, farmers have to have a relationship with a vet, right? That if you're going to treat an animal, that that is in consultation with a vet. Just because I think it might work or might have worked last time, it's because, as farmers, we have licences to use certain medicines, but it always has to be done in consultation with a vet.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: We have a great veterinarian in the riding of Essex. His name is Dr. Richard Barnett. As the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane said, veterinarians often form very strong relationships with their clients, almost become members of the family. I'd like to invite the member to talk about any famous veterinarians that he has in his riding, like our riding of Essex, where we have Dr. Richard Barnett.

Mr. John Vanthof: I don't know if we have any famous ones, but we certainly have some great ones. My first vet was Dr. John Pierce, and without John Pierce, I don't think I would have been a farmer—and I didn't always appreciate some of the ways he did it.

Dr. Connie Dancho and Dr. Lance Males were my later vets at the Temiskaming veterinary clinic. Again, they taught me the value of doing regular herd health, the long-term value.

I don't know if they're famous, but they've certainly made a huge difference to the farmers in Timiskaming.

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

Hon. Rob Flack: Obviously, it's a real honour today to stand in the Legislature and speak to Bill 171, the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act.

Speaker, as we've heard this morning and this afternoon, now is the time for the modernization, advancement and improvement to the vet act, and I've appreciated hearing and listening to the many comments that have been made, all supporting this particular piece of legislation. As we all have heard, the Veterinarians Act has not been substantively updated since 1989, and I want to

take a moment to thank the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for her foresight—again, emphasizing foresight—in bringing Bill 171 forward. It was long overdue, so kudos to her and her team.

If passed, the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act would provide a much-needed update to the legislation that governs veterinarians throughout Ontario. As the former parliamentary assistant, I heard from key stakeholders that I'll talk about in a few minutes, representing organizations such as the College of Veterinarians of Ontario, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians, amongst many, many other key stakeholders, about the need for change with this particular legislation. Their feedback was clear, and again, the vet act absolutely needs to be modernized.

I'd also like to acknowledge my colleague the member for Chatham-Kent–Leamington, who is also the deputy House leader, for his role and work as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. He's doing a great job and, I know, advocating well for veterinarians and animal health right across this province. I know he has worked hard and supported the minister in helping craft and develop this legislation.

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I'd also like to give—and I believe they're close to you, Speaker—a big shout-out to the entire team at OMAFRA, from the deputy minister and his team, who did a great job, and the chief of staff and her team in the minister's office. Thank you.

In particular, I'd like to thank Ryan Puviraj—I'm going to call him my wingman—who travelled with me throughout the province, keeping me on the straight and narrow. He certainly was a great support. We had a lot of fun listening and learning to the people advocating on behalf of the changes that were needed to our particular vet act in Ontario.

Let me go back in a little bit of time. I'm not going to tell all kinds of cow stories—but maybe a few, like my friend from Timiskaming–Cochrane. They were great stories. The only thing I would say about—how he did the twisted stomach was a little bit archaic, but there are different ways.

We talked at one time in this Legislature about all kinds of animals—avian, livestock, pork. We even talked about poultry husbandry at one point. I think we even talked about turkey breeding back in the spring of this year or fall of last year.

Agriculture and food is near and dear to my heart, having spent my life around it. My grandfather was a farmer in the Ottawa Valley—not too far from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I grew up around animals, and I love them. To this day, I have beef cows. I have a farm in that riding—I have had for years—and I have purebred Polled Herefords, so I can tell a lot of vet stories throughout my life.

My first story of remembering what a vet didn't do: I was probably under five, and I was at the farm at Highway 17 and White Water Road. It's a blueberry farm now, but

that was my grandfather's farm. I remember that Aunt Lizzie—his aunt, actually; great-whatever she would be—had a dog with porcupine quills in its snout. I remember she was saying, "Call the vet. Call the vet." My grandfather, coming from the Depression era, said, "It's going to cost money. We can do this." So at the age of four or five, I can remember bending down, scared to death, holding on to the muzzle of this collie mix mutt or whatever it was, and my grandfather holding it and pulling those darn quills out with tweezers—and it was kind of gross, but he didn't want to spend the money. So the need for vets has been around for decades. The dog lived; I'll tell you that.

I, too, thought about being a vet at one point in my career. But as my teacher said in one of my report cards, "Robbie, school"—

Interjection.

Hon. Rob Flack: Hang on. Yes, "Stick to politics." No, he said my sporting activities greatly interfered with my scholastic abilities, or studies, so I didn't get to vet school, and I'm glad I didn't—because it's a really tough job. But I remember, many years, many times, going to the barn, and I always wanted to be there when the vet came. No matter what happened or was going on, I would be the one who wanted to go to the vet, to the barn—calvings, twisted stomachs. We heard about milk fever, Caesarean burst, bloat, whatever it may be—I remember being there right in the middle of it and learning and listening and enjoying it very much.

I didn't give up on my dream totally. After going to Guelph, I started a career, obviously, in animal nutrition—and I thanked the member opposite for his great business over the years. Really, animal health is part of animal nutrition, or animal nutrition is part of animal health, and whether it's livestock, poultry, specialty animals or companion animals, it's very, very important.

The bottom line is that never before has the need for a modernized vet act been needed in this province. If passed, this legislation will make many positive changes, and it will impact animal care professionals such as vets, veterinary technicians and farmers alike.

Ontario farmers and pet owners rely on vet services to keep their animals healthy and safe. Ontario consumers who depend on livestock farmers for animal nutrition, protein, also benefit from these services which ensure that the food we consume is safe, healthy and humanely produced.

We must properly recognize our animal care professionals for their tireless work in the role of keeping our animals, large and small, very healthy. Part of that recognition is making their governing legislation reflective of the current realities in their industry.

Again, as I said, I spent a career in animal nutrition. The Feeds Act plays a lot with how we handle feed medicines, and I'll tell another little brief story here. In 2008, our company acquired the assets of Land O'Lakes in Ontario. With it came an animal health division, and it was called PharmBarn—not F-A-R-M, but P-H-A-R-M; pharmacy barn, a play on words. I thought, "Ah, what do we want to

be in this business for? I don't think this is going to be worthwhile keeping." Actually, the business is in the minister's riding in Wingham, where our plant is at, where the base of the business is. It was a distributor of animal health products—prescribed by veterinarians, in some cases—so we had a stronger working relationship with the Ontario veterinary community. I learned a lot with that business, and we've grown it. It still is a very important part of that business. What's important is the working relationship between our vet, vet technicians, animal nutritionists—as the member opposite said, they have to be in harmony.

On my beef farm—again, the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will know Dr. Tony Ruyter, who is a great vet—I'll come back to this a little bit later. What concerns me, here's a guy who has been a vet, graduated from Guelph, has probably been a vet for 45 years, and he wants to retire. He is, I think, about seventy-ish. If he's listening, I'm sorry if I'm divulging his age. He wants to go, but he's Johnny-on-the-spot. He's still working.

This phone is an amazing thing—I know you're not supposed to use props. Sorry, Speaker. But I can turn that phone on today—technology today; I was showing some folks earlier—and I can see live—my cows are calving right now—who is calving, who isn't, if they're having problems, if they are not. I've got other people, my herdsman and people at the farm, with that technology, so you don't have to necessarily get out of bed to go check cows. You can check the camera. The technology is great.

This year, we've had 45 calves. I can tell you that there has been a few times where we see someone who is having a little trouble, so what we do is we will phone the vet if we need the vet and they can come out right away. It speeds up the process for service. The key is, in underserved areas—and I'm going to say where the member opposite may not have that choice anymore—you can't phone the vet and expect someone to show up in 20 minutes or 30 minutes or 40 minutes. It could be four hours or half a day. This is where the role of vet technicians can come in, and this legislation deals with it directly.

So to all those who want to retire, I say to those vets, for the sake of animal welfare, please hang around as long as you can. And we'll talk in a few minutes about how we've added 20 spots for veterinary students in the province of Ontario.

Again, I'll talk a little bit about animal consolidation. What we used to do on farms years ago—herd sizes have changed. I'll give you an example: In the early 1980s, there were 22,000 dairy farms in Ontario; today I think 3,700 or a little bit less. There were 23,000 hog farms; today, I can tell you, less than 400 farms produce more pork than they did out of those 23,000. It's changed immensely. As such, the need and the desire for different services in terms of veterinary medicine needs to be done, and that's what this legislation deals with, absolutely.

As the agricultural industry modernizes, so must this legislation. Advanced and modern livestock farms need flexibility and mobility that the current vet act does not allow. There are complex needs in administering the

health of animals, and as my colleagues have already noted, the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act is a much-needed update to the vet act that will provide crucial structure for animal care professionals working in the province. It's just not the same as it was 35 years ago, as is the question I asked the member opposite. We're going to have to think about changing it in the next five to 10 years going forward because it's going to continually evolve.

When I was parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I had the absolute privilege—and I thank her for the opportunity—of chairing the vet act modernization round tables throughout the province. These round tables were held in communities like St. Thomas in my riding, Barrie, Lindsay, Huntsville, Pembroke—we were up to Thunder Bay and we held numerous—

Hon. Greg Rickford: Did you get to Kenora?

Hon. Rob Flack: We didn't get to Kenora, sorry. We got to Thunder Bay. You were invited.

Along with many virtual meetings, we dealt with all kinds of issues from veterinary needs to vet technicians, the role they need to play; the chiropractic choices that people are looking for in some cases; large versus small animals, companion animals; as well as urban versus rural needs. The purpose of these round tables was to receive as much public feedback from industry experts, farmers and animal owners as possible, and we got that feedback in spades.

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Having worked in the business of agriculture my whole life, and currently owning and operating a farm, I can say those consultations were very informative. I learned as much as I could give back. And I thank the minister again. She provided, I think, all stakeholders, and I've heard it now spoken from everyone that the consultative process worked and worked well. We had sheep and goat producers there, cattle, pork, equine, companion animals—all were represented.

It's an interesting statistic: Back before I was elected to the Legislature here, during COVID, it was said—and we had an animal health business and an animal pet food business, so we fed a lot of companion animals as well—that there was as much as a million more dogs in Canadian homes. Everyone is heard of the COVID dogs. Well, we got a lot. Whether it was a million or hundreds of thousands, whatever it may be, we did get a lot more. And we're seeing the effect of it today in our humane societies; we're seeing it in terms of need for vet technicians and vets. It's created its own mini-pandemic itself. So, again, I think this vet act, along with the work it's doing with technicians, is going to help manage that situation.

Our population continues to grow, and as it grows—people like pets—companion animals will need the changes in this act to help not only produce more food but to provide services to those family pets. There's never been more need for veterinary professionals to care for these animals, and I am pleased to share that the minister has acted.

As a side note—and I think everybody knows; we've talked about it before—I was pleased to join the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Colleges and Universities last March for a historic announcement at the University of Guelph. Our government announced investments that would increase the number of vet graduates in Ontario by 20 seats, opening spaces for Ontario students to choose a career in veterinary medicine. That was a very important piece of investment that is already serving the province well. It's the first time that a government increased the number of veterinary spaces since 1988.

We also introduced a new incentive—this especially helps northern Ontario and underserved communities—to expand the number of large animal veterinarians practising in these underserved communities. We'll provide up to \$50,000 over a five-year period to support their higher costs to service these regions throughout Ontario. So, again, I believe these changes—opening more spaces, providing the subsidization—help us immensely in terms of complementing the act that we're presenting in the Legislature here. A bias for action will continue to get it done for animal care professionals. As such, we must ensure that strong legislation is in place to support these professionals, not only today, but in the future.

Speaker, in terms of the organizations that came out to these consultative round tables, I'd like to thank the federation of agriculture; many humane societies throughout the province; many equine specialty vet services. Mobile veterinarians were out; Ontario Pork was there; Beef Farmers of Ontario were there; Ontario Sheep Farmers; Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. The college of veterinarians came to every meeting, whether it was virtual or in person. Ultrasound service providers were there; the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians—again, a big part of what this legislation is about; the beekeepers' association; particular livestock organizations as I've talked about; and the list goes on. Really, really great to have this support.

I'll give you a couple of quotes from key people that showed up. From Dr. John Stevens, CEO of the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association: “OVMA supports legislation that reduces the regulatory burden on the profession by recognizing the vital role of registered veterinary technicians.”

From Doug Brooks, the president and CEO of Ontario SPCA and Humane Society: “The Ontario SPCA and Humane Society strongly supports allowing registered veterinary technicians to practise at a level reflecting their training and expertise.” This will help “increase access to veterinary care....”

Finally, I will quote Drew Spoelstra, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture: “These proposed changes ... will ensure Ontario farmers have access to modern and quality care for their livestock, a crucial component to the economic stability of Ontario's rural communities.”

Speaker, this has gone a long way, I believe, in being consultative and also supporting every facet of animal

agriculture plus companion animals that the province has today.

Bill 171 represents a meaningful step in the right direction for Ontario veterinarians, and this government remains committed to this action. We will continue to work with stakeholders to build a modern, responsive framework for crucial work that they do. During the many consultations that our government hosted, I learned that stakeholders wanted to ensure that authorization of care reflected the modern needs of farmers. Speaker, I'm pleased to see that there will be a healthy update for the government structure that will reflect the feedback that we received.

Interjection.

Hon. Rob Flack: The member opposite got a little nervous there, got a little jumpy.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I just hope Catherine is not mad at me.

Hon. Rob Flack: I doubt it.

Last year, as part of the consultative process, I had a chance to go to the annual vet tech conference in Niagara, and I believe the minister experienced it this year as well when she went. It was amazing to me how excited these vet techs were to even have us talking about these proposed changes. There's a growing number of vet technicians in this province and they do unbelievable yeoman service. I heard it said in the debate a little bit earlier: really see vet technicians like nurse practitioners. They can play that type of role. As we modernize and grow and continue to consolidate, I agree that I think you're going to see the role of the vet technician continue to expand and be more important in everyday care of animals in this province.

We recognize that vet techs and farmers can administer the care on a day-to-day basis as informed by a veterinarian. We think this is very important and it's recognized in the bill. We need to provide comprehensive legislation that enables improved, proper and efficient care for animals. It's what I've heard during the consultations with stakeholders, and the government is proceeding, thankfully, in that direction.

Governments should support and allow professionals to provide informed and educated health care for animals, and after more than three decades, it's time for the vet act to be modernized. Common sense prevails with this legislation. Logical and progressive changes prevail with this legislation. Speaker, I'm happy to have spoken in support of the proposed Bill 171, Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, and look forward to further debate. Thank you for your time.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London for an impassioned speech. He's grown up on a farm. You can tell that you're very passionate about that. As it relates to the legislation, I do want to let you know that my sister-in-law is a large animal vet, entered the field 30 years ago, works in Ontario as a large animal vet—Ontario, California, because we lost

vets; this is now 25, 30 years ago—because the jobs were not here.

I think that, as we've indicated, the legislation will clarify some of these rules and responsibilities for veterinarians, and I think that will provide some clarity. There still remains a desperate shortage, though, of vets in Ontario. So my question to the member opposite: Given your commitment to farming, and even though we are losing 319 acres of land a day, quality farmland in Ontario, how do you reconcile moving forward in a sustainable way to ensure that the veterinarian sector is well supported in Ontario?

Hon. Rob Flack: A very good question. I think in my remarks I said we've opened up 20 new spaces, which is a good beginning. It's going to support veterinary colleges in both Thunder Bay and Guelph to expand, and hopefully it's going to be Ontario kids that get the job.

I would also add one component to her question that she could maybe have asked. We want to see more Ontario kids get into these schools, and I would respectfully suggest that marks are important, always, but not always the only criteria that people should get into vet college on. There are lots of people who want to stay and live in the community they live in or the province that they grew up in, so it's important that they get those opportunities, too, to get a seat in a vet college. But I would say that, in today's world, our population has more than doubled since I was in high school, and I would argue that we still feed every Ontarian who is in this province, and we continue to have a wonderful, robust and successful agri-food industry, and we will have for decades to come.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to thank the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London. What a valuable member of caucus, and now an associate minister, to have his depth of background that he mentioned, not only as a beef farmer, but his years of service as CEO of Masterfeeds. He kindly came to Lindsay to do a round table for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, but we also included Durham and, I think, Northumberland. The room was full, and so was the computer screen.

A shout-out to Mark Torrey and Steve Brackenridge from the OFA, that were there, and to Godfrey Tyler and his group from the Haliburton County Farmers' Association, because Haliburton county, for sure, has a shortage of vets—in fact, they don't have one right now. But as the community that Haliburton always is, it comes together to find the means.

Modernization, you mentioned, but you also mentioned about the vet techs and their increase in what they can do, and I wondered if you expand a bit on that.

Hon. Rob Flack: Again, it was great to be in Lindsay that night. I remember, when I travelled the province, for me it was a little like Old Home Week. When people say, "Where do you go when you come to Toronto?", I don't know where I am, but if you tell me where somewhere in small-town Ontario is, I can usually find it or get there,

because somewhere there's a farmer with a feed bin somewhere that we used to try and at least do business with.

Vet techs are going to be a massively important part of the role going forward. The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane said it best, and I agree totally with him: In the future, farms are going to be bigger and farther apart, especially in the northern and eastern parts of this province, so vet technicians will play a more important role. Even more importantly, they'll work in conjunction with their vet to make sure that the services can be done—things like ultrasounds, things like preg-checks—many different things that can be done, really, by a vet technician with oversight from a vet, but without a vet being on the farm. It's going to work, and work really well.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It has been an interesting discussion today, as we've been learning more and more about the veterinary sciences. But it's also interesting when we do a bit of research and preparation for these debates. We might pull some other pieces in, which is what I wanted to raise.

I found it interesting, and maybe a bit surprising that many veterinarians are experiencing a very significant mental health crisis. There is so much pressure. We think about vets, and maybe we connect them to a doctor's practice, with all of the pressures of establishing that practice, meeting expectations. But what is it that the government has heard in consultation—I don't think it's in this bill—but how are we going to address meaningfully that vets want to stay in the profession, but they may need support, especially when we're looking at such a mental health crisis?

Hon. Rob Flack: To the member from Oshawa: We heard that loud and clear. Anyone who's around the business of veterinary medicine will learn that mental health—I think in any profession today, stress is a big factor. When you've got so many clients and so many customers, and you have a large geography to manage and to service, it can be tough.

So the answer is giving vet technicians more opportunity to perform some of the services without a vet on site, and secondly, it's to continue to find more spaces for students to follow a career in veterinary medicine, like we did last year for the 20 spaces opening up both in Thunder Bay and in Guelph.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: To the minister: One of the things that we've talked a little bit about over deliberations in debate today is the grant for large animal vets. I know, obviously, you've got a lot of experience with having vets on your farm, and my—we'll say uncle; it's a bit of a complicated situation—but Uncle Chuck, if you're watching, which you probably aren't, was a large animal vet in northern Ontario as well, and he does actually have a moustache as well, Madam Speaker, so you'll be happy to know I'm channelling my inner Uncle Chuck today.

I just wanted you to talk a little bit more about what it means to be able to, especially in northern Ontario, have more large animal vets, especially as we're looking at ways—the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane was talking about it: more animal agriculture in northern Ontario, and really seeing that as a key to unlocking a lot of the potential in the north.

Hon. Rob Flack: It's a great question—I'll answer a little bit as a story, as an example. Shortly after we started the process of consultations, I was at the farm in the Ottawa Valley, and I needed a vet. Tony wasn't available, so we got this other vet to come in. I forget where he came from, but it was further west or east, down towards, I guess—was it Cornwall? It was a specialty thing I needed at the farm at the time; I won't get into the specifics. He came to me and said, "Do you know what you need to do? Subsidize us that have to travel a long way—because it isn't working. Why should I have to spend all this extra money? I can't charge you. It just isn't feasibly practical." So I heard it from him directly as a customer, as a client, and then we went to the different consultations and heard it loud and clear.

And lo and behold, this government, this minister, acted. It's not part of this legislation, but it's a meaningful and important step towards servicing those who are in underserved or more remote parts of the province.

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

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you to the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

We had the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations here today, and their very strong message was that universities and colleges are collapsing because they've been underfunded for so many years. The underfunding predates this government, but it has continued. And even the new funding is—by the time you divide it by three years and then divide it by 25 universities, 35 colleges, it doesn't amount to much. So even though we've got these great plans for new teaching opportunities for vets, my concern is—I wonder if you can help balance the books so that students can actually afford to get that training.

Hon. Rob Flack: It's a very good question.

I would start off by respectfully submitting that \$1.3 billion is a lot of money. And you're right—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's not enough.

Hon. Rob Flack: It's never enough. As you said, it has been underfunded for many years.

Generally, I take a look at the University of Guelph or Thunder Bay—up at Thunder Bay, we do a really good job in agriculture. That being said, we've opened up 20 spaces. There's a demand for more. What we have to do is create the need in communities and—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): That's all the time we have for questions.

Back to further debate.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to be able to stand in this Legislature and add what I hope are thoughtful

comments to the discussion on Bill 171, the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act.

Many moons ago, but since having been elected, I had the opportunity to serve as the critic for community safety and correctional services, as it was called then. One of the very first pieces of legislation that I was responsible for, as critic, was the then Bill 80, and that dealt with orcas in captivity; that dealt with, basically, the Marineland story of Kiska. It was a big and interesting topic, and I remember the passion and enthusiasm of animal welfare experts and their—maybe with the exception of optometry clients. Those who care about animals will drop everything that they are doing and rally to look out for and look after animals.

We're here talking about veterinarians, and I can't imagine that there are very many veterinarians who don't start early in life as enthusiastic animal lovers.

I'm quite surprised that my younger brother didn't pursue veterinary sciences, because he was a budding biologist, really. When we were up anywhere that there was fresh water, you could find him catching crayfish, learning all about them. I still remember when he was a wee little thing. I remember him sobbing and sobbing because he had heard a sound and he went to find what was making the sound and it was nature—a small snake eating a small frog—and his poor, little heart would just break, and that's when I knew that he was his mother's child for sure. I think both of them prefer animals to human company.

But as someone who comes from a family of animal lovers, I certainly have an appreciation for the passion and enthusiasm for making the world a better place for animals. So we have many hats in this Legislature, in this role, and we advocate for our constituents, the ones who call us, the ones who email us and maybe the ones that can't talk or text but are four-legged friends.

1700

So we're here debating a bill that is, as I said, the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act. It updates legislation governing veterinary professionals to reflect current practices. As we've heard from our critic, this was a bill that was well consulted, and we are always glad to have that be the case. It's happened like, what, four times in my 10 years here? Okay, maybe I'm exaggerating but when we are able to stand here and debate legislation that has been thoughtfully both researched and travelled and had experts weighing in so that it is the best version of the bill that it can be at this point, that is heartening to see.

Part of what this bill achieves, is it includes recognition that veterinary care is delivered by a team and acknowledges the roles of veterinary techs or vet techs. It defines a scope of veterinary practices that can only be done by registered veterinary professionals, and also it allows for a more streamlined complaints-and-resolution process, as well as a new quality assurance program and it establishes a reasonable framework.

Then, coming will be the regulations, and that will be done certainly—I'm sure that it will be, but I hope it will be done in consultation with those who really know what

the implications of the regulations would be. And so the final bill—or it won't come into effect until all of those regulations are done, and that will be following further consultation.

I'll read a little bit here, and I don't—actually, I'll get to that. Yes, I'll share. New legislation is set forward for veterinary medicine, and this is a piece submitted: “The Council of College of Veterinarians of Ontario ... is optimistic and energized with its new governing legislation, presented in Queen's Park....”

They go on to say, “Our council and the licensed members of our college recognize the impact of this legislation in supporting veterinary teams and enabling us to serve the public with efficiency, transparency and accountability. This is good news for the public, for veterinary medicine, and for veterinary teams in Ontario,” said Dr. Wade Wright, the college president.

Dr. Wright went on to say, “The veterinary profession prides itself on our teamwork, our innovation and our passion for animal health as we deliver safe, quality veterinary medicine. This pride extends to our council which is committed to serving the public and the profession with efficiency, transparency, and accountability. It has been frustrating to see the mismatch between today's expectations and our legislative authority. The Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act moves us in the right direction.” Well, that's good, okay. When the folks that you are bringing in legislation about say that this is welcome and that they've been involved in the process, that is a good thing.

From the ministry briefing document from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, they have highlighted that some of the key themes from the consultation period were that modern legislation is needed, continued governance in the public interest is essential, plan for future innovation, recognize team-based care, ensure flexibility, and consider needs of agriculture. Non-veterinarian practitioners can and do provide lower-risk care and engage stakeholders on future regulations. And those are some important key themes. I'm glad to know that they were part of the process, but it will be interesting for us, as legislators, to also watch this process continue, right?

We have here the piece of legislation that's basically a fresh start, it would seem. I mean, ultimately, this is—the new name for the regulatory college will be the College of Veterinary Professionals of Ontario—a bit of a fresh start. It repeals the current Veterinarians Act and replaces it with the Veterinary Professionals Act, or the VPA. It amends the OAVT Act to align with the provisions of the Veterinary Professionals Act. All of this is kind of a clean slate, but the other issues that the government would have heard at those consultations and the other issues that I'm sure will be raised in this House, through the thoughtful debate that will undoubtedly follow, will be those next steps—one would hope.

So, Speaker, a little bit from the world of veterinary medicine. Here is an article from TVO entitled “‘A High Emotional Toll’: Why Ontario Veterinarians Are Under

Pressure”—and I’m going to take this opportunity, because the bill is called Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, to talk about ways we can enhance care for animals. I’m also going to talk about maybe what doesn’t need to be in this bill, but what needs to be considered by the government as they’re dealing with this particular profession.

So in sharing this, we have more pets, but we don’t have more vets. As written—this is an article from November 2021: “Although the shortage of general and specialized animal care for pets and farm animals is especially acute in Thunder Bay and in many other northern cities and rural areas, vet offices are overbooked right across the province. Indeed, a dearth of vets and veterinary-support staff is an issue throughout Canada... ‘There’s a high emotional toll this is taking on people in the vet industry ... People that are in this industry, they care a lot.’” I think that we’ve heard that, and I think we all know that. Anyone who goes into animal care, that goes into, I imagine, veterinary science, they pursue that because they care.

This is a little bit of an interesting history. I mean, I think we recognize that pandemic pets were a thing, but this part of this article shares, “Things changed in 2017 ... ‘We started to see a real demand for vets. Our students were getting courted before they graduated. They were getting the jobs they wanted, where they wanted them, and starting salaries went up.’ And pet ownership started taking off around this time: Canadian Animal Health Institute figures indicate that the country’s dog population grew from 7.6 million in 2016 to 8.3 million in 2018.

“Then, during the pandemic, people scrambled to adopt. A November 2020 report ... found that 18 per cent of current pet owners had obtained a pet during the pandemic.

“COVID-19 also increased pressure on vet offices, as they scrambled to adjust to curb-side care, more cleaning, and telemedicine. Staffing availability worsened as people dealt with quarantines, kids at home, and elder care.” And that was happening across workplaces, but a lot of stress and pressure on an already pressured and stressed profession.

“As of 2020, Ontario had 5,125 licensed vets”—again, this is from 2021—“and estimates suggest that number should increase by 4 per cent a year to better meet demand.”

Then, it says, “Other long-term trends are at play: the arrival of more animals adopted from other countries, plus climate change have led to more incidents of illnesses such as kettle cough, tick-borne Lyme disease, and canine ehrlichiosis. Two kinds of tapeworm that harm dogs have been newly found in Ontario.” So as this article mentions, you’ve got a perfect storm for access challenges.

One of the things, back in 2021, that it says is that the veterinary college “hopes to expand enrolment beyond its usual 120 spots a year, but doing so would require additional funding from the provincial government.” As we’ve heard today, that is a step that is being taken. Good.

1710

So this is a challenge that is a global challenge, interestingly. We need more spaces. We need to support

vets in the work that they do, and also recognize, as we have talked about, that it’s not just highly specialized—it’s a specialized human that has to go into this line of work. It’s not only the skills, but it is, I imagine, the emotional connection.

So, Speaker, that said, I have a yucky and awful story to share. And as we’re talking about a bill, the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, and part of it calls for a more streamlined complaints and resolutions process, as well as a new quality assurance program, I want to highlight a really awful story that was from St. Catharines—a practising veterinarian in St. Catharines. This is from the National Post, and this is back in 2016:

“According to the College of Veterinarians of Ontario ... a man who once picked up a chihuahua by the neck and punched it repeatedly in the face will, after a brief suspension, be fit to practise veterinary medicine. That man—seen in video footage picking up an anesthetized cat and slamming it against a cabinet, hitting a dog on the snout with nail clippers and choking another dog until it defecates—can resume treating animals in 10 months, or six if he completes a course on ‘animal restraint and behaviour modification techniques.’ The regulatory body has likewise determined that \$10,000 is a sufficient fine (technically, the fee to cover the cost of the proceedings) for this man, whose abuse traumatized his patients and his staff, say former employees.

“The man is Dr. Mahavir Singh Rekhi, whose actions were secretly recorded by staff at Skyway Animal Hospital in St. Catharines ... over the course of three years and submitted to the” College of Veterinarians of Ontario “in 2014. In July, the college found Rekhi guilty of professional misconduct for demonstrating ‘consistent behaviours which are not in keeping with standards expected of veterinarians in Ontario.’”

Speaker, I’ll go on: “The problem with the decision and punishment meted out by the CVO—other than being hilariously soft—is that it assumes there is some rationality to the impulse”—I’m not going to read that; it’s too graphic. I’m going to paraphrase: to really awfully harm an animal. “There is none. And while a perpetrator might be able to learn how and when to repress those urges during a six- or 10-month suspension, no lesson could possibly remedy the ethical defect afflicting a person who would deliberately hurt an animal like that....”

“Jan Robinson, chief executive officer at the CVO,” at this time, “said that she understands the outrage about Rekhi’s case but that in the minds of those at the college, a 10-month suspension is ‘a serious suspension,’ particularly considering that it has revoked the licences of only four vets over the last 20 years.”

So that’s just a piece of it. If you look at this article, which is awful—or the story is awful, I should say—as far as I know, that vet is still a vet. I can’t imagine that he would have a lot of business in that community after people knowing what he had done.

I’m going to read another bit about this from Toronto Star:

“Ontario law gives the college broad discretion to revoke a licence when a veterinarian is found guilty of

professional misconduct. If Rekhi's transgressions don't rise to that level, what possibly could?....

"But no one is more dismayed than those who watched the abuses up close and brought the case against Rekhi. 'We got over 10 videos of him beating the crap out of animals,' said Jessica Hamilton, who worked as a veterinary technician at Skyway. 'That should be enough to get his licence taken away, and he gets a little tiny slap on the wrist? And he can touch animals again in four months? It's really messed up.'"

This article goes on to say, "For its part, the college says the penalty is strict enough. 'Revocation is the harshest punitive penalty any college can execute, of course.... But... revocations across any profession are also exceptionally rare.'"

This piece from the Toronto Star says, "Rekhi should no longer be allowed to treat animals with the province's blessing. The college, which is made up of veterinary professionals, says it exists to protect Ontarians' right to safe and ethical veterinary care. In this case, it seems instead to have protected one of its own."

I was going to read the graphic parts of the article, and I don't want to. They're awful. This individual was doing purposeful and very vicious harm to animals, while they were anaesthetized and otherwise. It was caught on video. His staff turned him in. As far as I know, he's still practising in the province—maybe in a different town where nobody has googled his name.

But when we're standing here talking about the Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, I want to make sure that the government is reminded that there may be very few egregious scenarios, and if something hits that threshold of egregious—as it said, a \$10,000 fine which covered the proceedings and six months of a suspension—I would like to know what in this bill says it allows for a more streamlined complaints and resolution process, as well as a new quality assurance program.

In terrible stories like that, which I hope to God don't happen ever again, the criticism was from the public that they did not feel reassured by that process. So I'm just going to leave that there for the government, because I don't believe that vets would behave that way, but this individual was an exception and an anomaly and did not have the consequences that, standing here, in my personal opinion, I would say reflected an appropriate way of handling that.

Those of you who've been to Oshawa may or may not know that we are famous for lots of things. We're famous for cars, but did you know that we're famous for kangaroos? The kangaroo that was bounding around Oshawa, the "shwigity roo"—I don't know; she didn't get named. But we had a kangaroo that was on the run in Oshawa, eventually caught by law enforcement. She was able to be secured. She only got in a good—not a punch, but a strike to the vest. Everyone was unharmed. However, what the heck was a kangaroo doing hopping around in Oshawa? I mean, we're exciting, and I invite everybody there, but we're not really known for our outback wildlife.

I'll tell you that I'm raising this because anyone can own a zoo in Ontario. We have a poor track record in terms

of how we handle that, but the government should look into the Oshawa kangaroo and rein in the roos in zoos.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I can appreciate that perhaps the member from Oshawa might not have as many farm or veterinarian concerns in her riding as we have in some other ridings, such as my riding or as the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane, but I'd like to ask her a question about veterinarians that might apply to small animals, because certainly those are common everywhere across the province of Ontario. I think that this piece of legislation would be very useful to all ridings, including the riding of Oshawa, in that it would provide more veterinarians and trained experts in that field to take care of not only farm animals, but also pets, and everybody loves their pets.

So I would like to invite the member from Oshawa to comment on whether or not she thinks the training of more veterinarians and vet techs under this legislation will be of benefit to the constituents in her riding.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes, I absolutely do, and I know that Oshawa, as all of our communities, has a whole bunch of pets that it loves. As I had just mentioned, we also had a kangaroo that we all claimed wasn't an actual pet. But I think people in our community would appreciate having more access to more professionals. So if we can have more vet techs, if we can have vets with maybe some help and support, a few more vets online, that would be great.

1720

I share a parking lot with a veterinary clinic, and it is a hopping, happening spot. Certainly in Oshawa, as everywhere, we love our pets and we want to make sure that they have access to the care that they deserve when needed. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The whole speech was interesting, but I must say that the last little part talking about this kangaroo who ended up in her community sort of piqued my interest.

Mr. John Yakubuski: She was hopping around all over the thing.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes. I was curious to see how a kangaroo could end up on the side of a road? I mean, we all want to protect animals. We all know that that's not where they belong. They don't even belong on this continent. We don't have kangaroos in the Americas. How did that happen? I am glad that the police officers were able to recapture this animal, but to do what? Who did that to the kangaroo to start out with?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Folks have a lot of questions about how there was the Oshawa kangaroo. It was hopping around for days and everyone was really interested in making sure the kangaroo was able to be safe at the end of the story, which, yes, it is.

However, where on earth did this kangaroo come from? Apparently, it was being transported from one zoo to

another. They stopped so it could stretch its legs, and it literally hopped over a fence and ran away. So, who was transporting this and why?

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I know, but next time it could be a lion.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I know, but zoo owners are not beholden to anyone. I'll read something here: "I know zoo owners that have transported crocodiles in the back of their car."

There is stricter legislation that needs to be considered when it comes to zoos. We are famous for roadside zoos, and some of you might feel affectionate towards them, but we do not have regulations. You, too, could have a roo.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

The member from Kent—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Oh, I can't—

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you, Speaker: Chatham-Kent-Leamington. I would invite you to come down and anyone else to come down and see our area.

I want to stray from the topic of the Oshawa kangaroo because that doesn't have anything to do with this bill. It's interesting, ripped from the headlines, but there is something that the member from Oshawa touched on that will bring some relevance here. Does the member for Oshawa agree that through streamlining the complaint process and clarifying the role of investigators, we're actually strengthening the ability to investigate instances of animal welfare?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: You're not wrong that I digressed to talk about kangaroos and that that was ripped from a headline but, also, we lived it in Oshawa. But it is interesting, and I'll reconnect it to this bill.

Somewhere in some zoo, there are kangaroos that this province doesn't know about, because these roadside zoos are not licensed, they're not anything. The government does not have eyes on it unless they get a complaint. Okay? But hopefully there are vets looking after those animals, one would hope, but again, when Ontario is ranking dead last in zoo regulations report cards, the government knows this, that there is that gap.

So you've got animal professionals, veterinarians that are being called to look after animals that shouldn't be allowed to be there. So there are some pieces that I imagine you will hear from the veterinary community, but again when this government calls a bill Enhancing Professional Care for Animals Act, then I would say that all zoos should ensure that they have professional care for animals. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I really appreciate the comments from the member for Oshawa. My family is from Oshawa, and when I go to visit there, I hear often about the

incredible work that you're doing for the community and how much it's appreciated.

You were talking about the kangaroo. In Toronto, we had a pair of capybaras that escaped from the High Park Zoo a while ago, and they went gallivanting all over the city. They were spotted in Scarborough and everywhere else before they were finally brought home. You talked about this kangaroo that was on the lam in the 'Shwa. But there's another story as well, I understand, about a deer that showed up for work one day. Can you please tell us about the deer that showed up?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: We serve all sorts in Oshawa.

It was a Sunday morning, and my staffer got a call from the police and was asked if he worked for Jennifer French the MPP, and when he confirmed, they said, "You have to come to the office." He did not know what he would find. There were five or six cop cars, and a deer had run through my glass window, done a lap around my office, left me messages and left again. We saw the security footage. It was quite a day. That deer ran back and had stories to tell. There were two other deer that came to Oshawa that day. We don't know where one of them went; the other one ran into a bar. That deer ran into a bar and passed the bar, and the bartender was behind, and one person got up and ran behind, and the other sat there and didn't miss a sip. That deer stood at the back for four or five hours, waiting for karaoke, until the vets and the ministry came to peacefully tranquilize it, take it out on a sled, get it care and release it, also with stories.

So, welcome to Oshawa. But all that to say, a vet probably doesn't know what their day is going to look like, especially on a Sunday in Oshawa.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the member for her remarks.

I am confident that the member from Oshawa agrees with the benefits of a quality assurance committee, and I would also believe that the member also agrees that continued education for a regulated profession does align with other regulated professions, like doctors, lawyers, for example.

My question to the member is, do you believe it is an important feature to ensure that those who administer animal care have the most up-to-date education?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes, absolutely. I think up-to-date training with the newest technologies or—and we heard the member from Timiskaming tell us that there are some tried and true techniques that you maybe aren't going to learn in school; you might have to learn by doing or learning on the farm. But I absolutely think that ensuring vets and vet techs have the best education and up-to-date training is super.

What we also are glad to see is more spaces, but we need to make sure that those vets have the support they need to stay in practice, and that they can indeed be found across communities where they're needed. And those who are from other countries—I have read that it's also a recommendation to be able to get them into practising in a

fair way, but make sure there's a clear path for those who come with—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It is a pleasure to join the debate on Bill 171 here this afternoon. It's quite a substantial bill, by the way. I was taken by the comprehensiveness of this bill. General history in this place would say that when a bill is this substantial, we're going to have a lot of disagreement from the other side.

I just want to say to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and her staff and the folks at OMAFRA: What a great job. Here we stand today and we have a bill that ostensibly satisfies the opposition, notwithstanding the member from Oshawa who raised some issues that maybe aren't addressed in this bill. But one bill alone can never address all of the issues here in the province of Ontario, no matter what the sector. I mean, it would take more than one bill just to figure me out.

1730

But I do want to say that this is something that is increasingly rare and a real breath of fresh air, when you have a bill where you've gone through the process. You haven't done this willy-nilly or with your eyes half-closed; you've gone through the process of consulting properly with all of the stakeholders involved in the sector, and that in itself, I think, is a lesson to be learned. We can accomplish a lot in this place by going through that process on a repetitive basis, and that's exactly what our government wants to do: We want to bring forth good legislation that speaks to a need.

A lot of people would ask themselves, "Are you kidding me that this act essentially hadn't been reviewed or updated since 1989?" Our youngest daughter, Emily, was born in 1989. She's going to be 35 years old this year. I can't imagine anything in 35 years not having been updated. I mean, I've been updated several times, and there's no chance of actually getting it right, but I have been updated several times, and 35 years is a long time to go.

And I'm not a farmer. I think everybody here knows this. It doesn't mean I can't spread it, but I'm not a farmer by trade. However, one of the things we all know about farming—or we should know—is that each and every one of us has an absolute biological need to be nourished: to eat, to drink, to take on the kinds of food and the liquids that sustain us. I think sometimes we lose sight—not intentionally; just because we live in a world that is running helter-skelter and all over the place, and our attention is taken here and there—of where that nourishment comes from. We lose sight of the fact that without our farmers, without those who produce the food, we're going to starve, unless you're going to produce it yourself, which brings me back to the old days, way before my time—in fact, even before you, Minister Lumsden.

So I think about the stories that my dad would tell, because it's before his time too. Let me think—one, two, three—I'm fifth-generation here in Canada. My family

immigrated from what was then what was then West Prussia, Poland, in 1868, and they, like everybody else, were given a tract of land, 100 acres. The old homestead still exists down Siberia Road, in what we call Siberia. It's not like the Siberia in Russia, but it's not far from it. This was a tract of land that they were given: "Now you're going to be here in Canada."

My great-great-grandfather Paul Yakabuski—my father's name was Paul Yakabuski as well—was the first one of our clan to come on the Yakabuski side. The Conways came from Ireland, of course, and they settled more in the Brudenell area. But in the Siberia Road area, many of the Polish settlers, from the Kashubian part of Poland, came and settled there.

I'm telling you, if you've never been to my area, you're going to ask yourself, "Besides rocks, what could you grow there?" It was some of the most un-arable land that you could think of—just pitiful. But by the sweat of their brow and by their commitment to a new land and a new life—think about it: In the first year you were there, you would have to have crops in the ground and a roof over your head. Obviously, people helped one another. You didn't have the ABC construction company coming in and, "Well, we'll pour the foundation, and Joe's going to come and do the framing, and Billy will put the roof on." No. Work had to be done in a very rudimentary way. The cabins and the things that were built were pretty basic, but all the while, you had to be prepared to be able to produce some food, and if you didn't, you had to be able to barter some things with someone who was producing food. So when you think about it, that's absolutely the kind of life when it began here in Canada for our ancestors that came from different parts of the world but primarily European countries and what it was like.

So my grandfather Frank Yakabuski bought a business from a fellow by the name of Stephen Smith, and his original business was farm implements and things such as that that everybody needed some kind of. Everybody had some farming. Whether they were doing some crops or raising some livestock, almost everybody that had one of those 100-acre plots did some farming on their own. So that was part of his business.

And I tell you this story about my grandfather—I mean, obviously, I wasn't there, but he may have gotten into that business somewhat by design or somewhat by accident. But he bought the business from a fella by the name of Stephen Smith, and I can only surmise that Stephen Smith decided he wanted to get out of the business because he wanted to leave Barry's Bay, and I'll tell you why. The house that we live in, my wife, Vicky, and—our children were raised in there as well. It's on the same plot, on the same piece of ground that my grandfather's house was on, and he didn't just buy the business from Stephen Smith; he bought the house. And I can only surmise that Stephen Smith wanted to start a new life of his own, because in the early 1900s—and we lived beside the cemetery. In the early 1900s, during a diphtheria epidemic—and I'm not going to say exactly. I'm not sure if it's eight or nine, but Stephen Smith and his wife lost eight children during that

diphtheria epidemic. So you can imagine what he would have gone through, him and his family, and they just wanted to have a start somewhere else.

So my grandfather bought the house, he bought the business, and that's how he got into business. He was also an undertaker, because do you know what? It doesn't matter how small the town is, it doesn't matter where you come from, people die, and somebody's got to look after the dead. Well, that was what my grandfather did as well.

So, all along, we've seen the evolution to some degree of the agricultural industry in my neck of the woods, as they say, which is not unique. Everybody sitting here, if their families were here, went through that same thing. Somewhere here in Canada, it might have been Saskatchewan, like my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence; it might have been somewhere else, but everybody who came here in that period, in the 1800s, went through that same kind of heartache, hardship, wondering if they were going to survive but slowly inching ahead, and the same thing happened to our agricultural industry.

Can you imagine the stoneboats? If you come to my area and you—Wilno. You may have heard of the Wilno hills. It's famous for the stone fences, and Brenda Lee-Whiting actually wrote a book called Harvest of Stones. It's about farming in Renfrew county in the early days, because that's what it was, a harvest of stones. And it's amazing, because every spring, you thought you had them all, and every spring, there was a whole new crop of stones, because the frost would drive them up, the ones that you didn't get the year before, and you had to deal with those stones that year.

So this is part of the growth and the, as I say, the evolution. Technology: I mean, we don't think of going from plowing by hand and then having a horse to pull that plow as technology, but that's exactly what it is; it's just a different kind at a different stage. So slowly but surely, they improved the way that they cultivated and harvested.

1740

And that speaks to why our government—and our government values agriculture at the highest level, because, as I said in my opening remarks, you can do without that fancy new car and you can do without 27 pairs of shoes—okay, maybe some can't—but you can't live without food. You can't live without food. And that's why you have to, every day—I'm sure you've seen the little licence plate holders, the frames around the licence plates. I think it says something like “Did you eat today?” or “If you ate today, thank a farmer.” Well, that's exactly what our government sees. And farmers are feeling the pressure of not enough veterinarians, something that we recognize.

I want to thank my colleague the Associate Minister of Housing for the work that he did. He criss-crossed this province, and I'll tell you about Pembroke. He came to my riding, in Pembroke—the biggest consultation they had, the best-attended consultation they had. I think it was the fact that we brought some snacks. But he traversed this province to find out what people were saying on the ground, what the real people were saying about agriculture and the situation regarding veterinary medicine here in

Ontario. He didn't go out there with a preconceived picture of what we needed to do; he went out with his eyes open and his ears open, and maybe his mouth shut a little bit.

Along with the PA from Chatham-Kent–Leamington—**Interjection:** Great guy.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Of course, a great member, an OPP officer. I've got so much respect. Thank you for your service.

And, of course, the Minister of Agriculture: We heard her speak today for 60 minutes, and she covers it all. She has done it all. She understands the file so much better than someone like myself.

But what I get excited about is when you see the results of those processes. Those meetings that were held—I don't have the list in front of me, but you heard from Minister Flack and Minister Thompson. You've heard from them where all those consultations were. I was part of the one in Pembroke, and let me tell you, folks: Everybody here, I'm sure that your grandmother said at some time that you learn something new every day, and if you don't, well, you've been sleeping or something. But I can't tell you how much I learned at that meeting about veterinary medicine, but not only the medicine itself; the problems that are out there: not enough veterinarians.

Our farmland is more productive than it has ever been. We produced more on our farmland today than we ever have. We're an exporting province in agricultural products, even after we're feeding our 15-million-people population. Because of technology, we're more productive, but that means we can raise more livestock. It also means we need to be able to take care of those livestock.

When you look at rural Ontario—and I want to thank the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, because he can paint a picture pretty well about what it's like in northern Ontario, because that's his canvas. He knows it. The challenge of getting a veterinarian to the place of where he or she is needed when you've got miles and miles between them and the farm is a daunting task.

So how do you address that? Well, one of the things you do is you graduate more veterinarians. So 20 additional seats between Thunder Bay and Guelph means we're going to have more veterinarians able to service those farms. “Winner, winner, chicken dinner,” as they say. You can't go wrong with that one. Now, on top of that—and I'm just touching the surface of this bill; I could speak for a week if I actually knew more about it.

But what about \$50,000 over five years to assist a new veterinarian who's willing to work and serve a rural or remote area? How is that going to help the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane and anybody else that has an expanse in the rural areas? Do you know how you make those decisions? You come to the conclusions from listening to people. Oh, I'm so excited about this, because of the work that's been done to get to where we are today.

Now, that's not all. That's not all—

Mr. Dave Smith: There's more.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, yes, there's more. I won't have time to do it all, but I want to cover one more thing.

What have we heard in the health care field for years now with the challenge of having enough primary care doctors? How can we help to get people service in the medical field with the number of doctors that we have or don't have and doctors retiring? Well, ding-a-ling-a-ling, nurse practitioners have had a tremendous impact in being able to service patients in a timely way when there's a shortage of docs.

Veterinary technicians are the livestock-animal answer to the nurse practitioner. So we're going to increase and broaden the scope of practice for veterinary technicians. Again, you want to talk about getting it right? There's no such thing as getting it more than 100% right, but if they ever invent that, here's something that does get it that way, because that's exactly what we need: more people who can deliver the service to the farms. And we're not just talking about large animals here—for the farms, it's large animals mainly—but also pets and small animals as well. Because we have a shortage of vets in every sector.

So I want to just thank everyone who's been so involved and active in this, and I did want to just comment on one thing from the member for Oshawa, as she was talking about animal abuse. I've always believed that anybody who will abuse an animal, you can count on that person as being someone who will abuse another human being as well. There is no excuse. It can never be acceptable, and it needs to be dealt with in the harshest ways possible. Do we agree 100% on that?

So as I said, Speaker, and I didn't even get to all of the copious notes that I put down here, but I want to thank everybody who's been so involved in this. It's a great piece of legislation. I look forward to the further debate, and I thank the opposition for stating clearly right from the start that they're going to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions. I recognize the member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his animated and excited presentation. One thing that I'm excited about in my area of London is the Humane Society London and Middlesex and their current project.

With their project, they've asked this government for \$1.5 million. The federal government stepped up. The municipal government has stepped up. In fact, London's city council has supported Humane Society London and Middlesex with \$3 million. That's twice what they've asked the province.

Will this government invest in the skills pipeline necessary to train veterinary technicians and support HSLM's funding ask, yes or no?

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Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I have to be straight with you. I'm not familiar with the application, and I don't think I'm the person that has the authority to answer the question either. But anybody who's bringing forth ideas to our government—we are here; we are always open to good ideas. If someone brings forth a suggestion that can help the people of Ontario, I can tell you that Premier Ford and this PC government are going to be right there, front and centre. We believe every single day—we're here for one

reason: To make sure that we leave this province in better shape than when we got it, and that's an absolute guarantee. Sir, you can take that one to the bank.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. I always enjoy, especially when we're getting late in the day, his debate. It is always lively and vigorous and keeps us awake. So thank you very much, sir, for that.

You touched on it right at the end, the \$50,000 over five years for the new vets that are getting into the business and want to be in more rural and remote areas. You obviously serve a rural area. I've got a little bit of both, but being from northern Ontario, I certainly have had the experience of knowing what it's like to look for veterinary care, especially with large animals—having many family members that have farms up north.

I just wondered if maybe you wanted to expand a little bit more about how that will help new vets get into the industry and how important it is for rural and northern Ontario.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Kitchener–Conestoga for his question and also for his continued advocacy on this issue and many, many others as well.

I mean, \$50,000 is not chump change. Anybody who's getting into a new career, when they're starting out, one of the things that everyone faces is, how am I going to pay the bills that I've accumulated just getting to where I am today? So if you have a government that is willing to say, "Look, we need you, we need your skills, and we're going to help you practise in a rural or remote area. How are we going to do that? Over five years, we're prepared to pony up \$50,000 to make this transition for you less challenging"—and you know that people that are going to rural and remote areas, the cost of living isn't the same as here. You're not going to pay \$4 million for a garage. There, it's going to be very, very helpful for them to get started out in that rural area, and I look forward to seeing more people come to our areas—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

Further questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member from Nipissing–Pembroke–Renfrew—I probably got that in the wrong order. But anyways, I appreciate your comments today. You are always an entertaining speaker.

You said something, though, that just doesn't hold up to analysis. You said this government values agriculture and that we are an exporting jurisdiction. Actually, Ontario is not an exporting jurisdiction. Some of the numbers that I've come across since I came into this House have actually really concerned me. Ontario is enormous, a million square kilometres, but only 5% of our land is arable. Under the Liberals, the province of Ontario was paving over 180 acres of farmland a day; under this Conservative government, it's now up to 319 acres of farmland a day. If they keep going at that pace, in 100 years, there will be no more farmland. We import \$10

billion more food than we export, and our population is growing by 400,000 a year, so we need to protect our farmland.

The veterinarians are really important, but will your government commit to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member.

Response: the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I missed the last part because your mike wasn't on. But you're a quiet speaker. I can barely hear you even when the mike is on. Nobody ever says that about me.

And this may be the debate, I say, to the member for—York Centre, is it?

Mr. Chris Glover: Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Fort York, yes. So this may be the debate, because we emphatically disagree with your numbers. We are absolutely certain our numbers back it up, that Ontario is an exporting jurisdiction when it comes to agriculture products. We are producing more food than we've ever done before, because we've invested in the technology, we've invested in the people, and we are doing the kinds of things that make Ontario a world leader in agricultural production.

So we may not agree on everything, but I'll tell you, good things grow in Ontario. That's for sure.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague for his remarks this afternoon.

I just want to point out that in my riding of Perth–Wellington, there is more livestock than people—probably 10 to 1, if I was to guess. So we are massive, massive exporters of food across the world.

As some members know, I grew up on a dairy farm. Obviously, vets visited that farm often. I remember growing up with Jim the vet and others over the years—helping service our family farm, ensuring our animals were, as the member mentioned, healthy and safe.

I was wondering if you could talk a bit about the vet technicians. One of the first doors I knocked on when I was running turned out to be a vet technician's, and they mentioned how they wanted to be able to help their community more. So I was wondering if the member could expand on that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Some people say that I've milked a lot of things in my life, but the truth is, I've never milked a cow.

But I will say this: The vet technicians at those meetings that my colleague the member for Elgin–Middlesex–

London—he said these vet technicians were over the moon that they are now seeing themselves so much more vital in the field of veterinary medicine. They are being recognized and they are being rewarded for the work that they've done and the training that they've had. They now see themselves as so much more an integral part, and a top-level part, because they're going to perform so many of the things that had to be done by vets before, and some of them are things that, quite frankly, the veterinary technicians are mega-more-than-capable to do them than they've been recognized for.

So these are huge investments, huge advancements, that are going to mean more safety, more protection for our farm animals.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his comments.

As he knows, I represent a northern, rural riding where access to veterinarian services of any kind is next to non-existent, and I'm hopeful that things could change for the better. So I'm asking the member: How confident are you that the provisions in the bill will lead to services being accessible to people in northern, rural Ontario? Even in Sudbury, veterinarian services are very limited. As soon as you go a little bit out of Sudbury, which is the area that I represent—whether you talk about Dowling, Onaping, the watershed, Gogama, it's really hard. Are you confident that access will improve for us?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much to the member. I know how committed she is to her folks up there.

Confident? Absolutely. We've taken the steps to make sure that we lay the groundwork to make that possible, because we're making the changes—I offer no guarantee, because I don't make promises I can't keep. But I will say this: The steps that we have taken build a foundation for making those things more possible tomorrow than they were yesterday, and that's exactly what we're talking—progress. We may not solve the problem tomorrow—it may take some time—but our commitment is ironclad to make sure we do the things that will make sure that the veterinarians who are needed in northern and remote communities are there.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the members for that rousing discussion around veterinary care.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): It is now time for private members' public business.

Report continues in volume B.

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