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Jeudi
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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 29 February 2024 / Jeudi 29 février 2024

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Get It Done Act, 2024, Bill 162, Mr. Sarkaria / Loi de 2024 pour passer à l'action, projet de loi 162, M. Sarkaria

Ms. Peggy Sattler	7393
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	7393
Mr. Anthony Leardi	7393
Ms. Peggy Sattler	7393
Mr. Anthony Leardi	7394
Mme France Gélinas	7394
Mr. Anthony Leardi	7394
Mr. Joel Harden.....	7397
Mrs. Daisy Wai	7397
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	7397
Mr. Stephen Crawford.....	7397
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	7398
MPP Jamie West	7398
Mr. Brian Riddell	7401
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	7401
Mr. Rick Byers.....	7401
Mr. Joel Harden.....	7402
Mr. Ric Bresee	7402
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	7402

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Sports and recreation infrastructure funding

Mr. John Jordan.....	7402
----------------------	------

Black History Month

Ms. Peggy Sattler	7403
-------------------------	------

Black History Month

Mr. David Smith	7403
-----------------------	------

MedsCheck Program

Ms. Sandy Shaw.....	7403
---------------------	------

Non-Profit Appreciation Week

Mrs. Daisy Wai	7404
----------------------	------

Gun violence

Mr. Tom Rakocevic	7404
-------------------------	------

Government investments

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff	7404
--------------------------	------

Norman Jewison

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	7404
---------------------------------	------

Public transit

Ms. Laura Smith.....	7405
----------------------	------

Health care funding

Mr. Andrew Dowie	7405
------------------------	------

House sittings

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott).....	7405
------------------------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

Mr. Sheref Sabawy.....	7405
Ms. Marit Stiles.....	7405
Mr. John Fraser	7406
Ms. Lisa MacLeod.....	7406
Mr. Joel Harden.....	7406
Mr. Mike Schreiner	7406
Mr. Andrew Dowie	7406
Miss Monique Taylor	7406
Ms. Stephanie Bowman.....	7406
Hon. Michael D. Ford	7406
Ms. Peggy Sattler	7406
Mr. Aris Babikian.....	7406
Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	7406
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	7406
Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta	7406
Mme France Gélinas	7406
Mr. Sheref Sabawy.....	7406
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	7406
Hon. Graydon Smith	7406
MPP Jill Andrew	7406
Hon. Michael Parsa	7407
Ms. Bhutila Karpoche	7407
Hon. Nina Tangri	7407
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	7407
Ms. Laura Smith.....	7407
Hon. Stan Cho	7407
Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	7407
Ms. Christine Hogarth.....	7407
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	7407

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Justice system

Ms. Marit Stiles.....	7407
Hon. Doug Downey.....	7407

Pharmacare

Ms. Marit Stiles.....	7408
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	7408

Health care funding

Ms. Marit Stiles.....	7409
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	7409

Taxation	
Mr. Will Bouma	7410
Mr. Kevin Holland	7410
Prescription drugs	
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	7410
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	7411
Mme France Gélinas	7411
Anti-racism activities	
Ms. Patrice Barnes	7411
Hon. Michael D. Ford	7411
Health care	
Mr. Wayne Gates	7412
Mrs. Robin Martin.....	7412
Justice system	
Mme Lucille Collard.....	7412
Hon. Doug Downey	7413
Transportation infrastructure	
Mr. Graham McGregor	7413
Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria	7413
Autism treatment	
Miss Monique Taylor.....	7414
Hon. Michael Parsa.....	7414
Mining industry	
Mr. Ross Romano	7414
Hon. George Pirie	7414
Justice system	
Mr. Chris Glover	7415
Hon. Doug Downey	7415
Forest firefighting	
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	7416
Hon. Graydon Smith	7416
Justice system	
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	7416
Hon. Doug Downey	7416
Taxation	
Mr. Ric Bresee	7417
Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy.....	7417
Business of the House	
Hon. Paul Calandra	7417
Independent members	
MPP Andrea Hazell	7417
Supplementary estimates	
Hon. Paul Calandra	7418
The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	7418

**INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS /
PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES
ET VISITEURS**

Hon. Michael D. Ford	7418
Mr. Deepak Anand.....	7418

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS**

Standing Committee on Government Agencies

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott).....	7418
Report deemed adopted.....	7418

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

**1082472 Ontario Limited Act, 2024, Bill Pr39,
Mr. Byers**

First reading agreed to.....	7418
------------------------------	------

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS
MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES**

Black History Month

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams	7418
Hon. Michael D. Ford	7419
MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	7421
MPP Andrea Hazell.....	7421
Ms. Aislinn Clancy.....	7422

MOTIONS

Committee membership

Hon. Andrea Khanjin	7422
Mr. John Vanthof	7423
Motion agreed to	7424

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Ontario Place

Mr. Chris Glover	7424
------------------------	------

Renewable energy

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	7424
---------------------------------	------

Tuition

Ms. Peggy Sattler	7425
-------------------------	------

Social assistance

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	7425
---------------------------------	------

Tuition

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche	7425
---------------------------	------

Tuition

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	7425
-------------------------------	------

Access to health care

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam	7426
----------------------------	------

Employment standards

Ms. Peggy Sattler	7426
-------------------------	------

Social assistance

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche	7426
---------------------------	------

Adoption disclosure

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	7426
-------------------------------	------

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Get It Done Act, 2024, Bill 162, Mr. Sarkaria / Loi de 2024 pour passer à l'action, projet de loi 162, M. Sarkaria

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	7427	Mr. Ric Bresee	7442
MPP Andrea Hazell	7427	Ms. Sandy Shaw	7442
Ms. Sandy Shaw	7428	Mr. Chris Glover	7443
Ms. Aislinn Clancy	7428	Mr. Rick Byers	7446
Hon. Stan Cho	7428	Mr. Wayne Gates	7446
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	7429	Hon. Michael S. Kerzner	7446
Mr. Andrew Dowie	7429	Ms. Jessica Bell	7446
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	7429	Hon. Andrea Khanjin	7447
Mr. Rick Byers	7429	Mr. John Fraser	7447
Mr. Andrew Dowie	7430	Hon. Stan Cho	7449
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	7432	Mr. Wayne Gates	7449
Mr. Stephen Crawford	7432	Mr. Matthew Rae	7449
Ms. Bhutila Karpoche	7433	Mr. John Vanthof	7450
Mr. Sheref Sabawy	7433	Hon. Stan Cho	7450
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	7433	Ms. Sandy Shaw	7450
Mr. Tom Rakocevic	7433	Mr. Sheref Sabawy	7450
Hon. Rob Flack	7436	Mr. Chris Glover	7452
Ms. Sandy Shaw	7437	Mr. John Jordan	7453
Mr. Rick Byers	7437	Ms. Jessica Bell	7453
Mr. Chris Glover	7437	Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	7453
Hon. Michael S. Kerzner	7438	Mr. Stephen Crawford	7453
Ms. Aislinn Clancy	7438	Mr. Wayne Gates	7454
Mr. Matthew Rae	7438	Ms. Jessica Bell	7454
Ms. Peggy Sattler	7439	Mr. Rick Byers	7455
Hon. Andrea Khanjin	7439	Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon	7456
Hon. Nina Tangri	7439	Hon. Michael S. Kerzner	7456
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	7441	Ms. Peggy Sattler	7456
Mr. John Jordan	7442	Mr. Trevor Jones	7457
Mr. Wayne Gates	7442	Mr. Wayne Gates	7457
		Mr. Rick Byers	7458
		Ms. Sandy Shaw	7459
		Ms. Peggy Sattler	7459
		Second reading debate deemed adjourned	7459

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 29 February 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 29 février 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prières / Prayers.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GET IT DONE ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR PASSER À L'ACTION

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 28, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 162, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la protection contre les taxes sur le carbone et modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand that when we last debated Bill 162, the member for Oshawa had made her presentation. So now, we'll go to questions and responses with respect to the presentation made by the member for Oshawa.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I was fortunate to be here yesterday when the member for Oshawa made her presentation. She talked quite a bit about the issue of tolls, and she shared with us a motion that had just been passed, I think that day, yesterday, by the region of Durham.

I know that one of the schedules in this bill deals with tolls, with removing tolls. I wondered if the member could tell us if that schedule will do anything for the people of her community.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the question. Folks will remember the 412 and 418 and that I tabled my private member's bill, and four years later, finally, the government removed those. I think part of the reason that the government finally followed through with that was because it was unfair, broadly across Durham region, that we're the only part of the province with a tolled road.

So here we have schedule 6 that says, "We won't toll provincial highways, unless it's in an act. Oh, but by the way, 407 ETR that's privately owned and the 407 East, which is owned by the province, we're not touching those."

When Durham has asked for temporary removal because of construction and now that they've asked for permanent removal of the tolls from the provincial section, the government has its hands over its ears, and all we hear is crickets. They're not taking the tolls off. It's just Durham that has a tolled stretch of provincial highway.

So this bill does sweet nothing for the folks of Durham.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Schedule 4 of this act has a provision—and I'll go slowly so that the member has an opportunity to refer to it if she hasn't seen it already. It says that the schedule is amended to provide that "for each six-month period or part thereof during which a photo card is valid, the holder of the photo card shall pay a fee of \$3.50." So in other words, the fee is now fixed in legislation and may not be automatically amended, unless another piece of legislation is introduced to amend the fee. So that's \$3.50, and I would like to ask the member if she believes that fee is too low, too high or somewhere in between, and whether she agrees that should be fixed at \$3.50?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As all members in this House, we hear from our constituents when issues matter to them, when government decisions affect them, and I can honestly say I have never once heard anything about photo cards and the fee. So I'm going to go with the \$3.50 is what it is.

In fact, I appreciate the member focusing on schedule 4. I will also liken it to schedule 2 that deals with drivers' licence fees and fixes it at \$7.50 for each six-month period. The \$7.50 and the \$3.50 for each six-month period for photo cards now being fixed in statute, are equal to the—wait for it—existing fee. So there is no change. It had been regulation, and now it's fixed in statute. There is no change to the customer, to the community member. They're not going to feel any difference. It's just some shift from regulation into statute. And honestly, who cares?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Again, to the member for Oshawa, last night, she gave us a little bit of a history of this government's experience with licence plates in Ontario. And schedule 2 of this bill, establishes a framework to enable automatic licence plate renewals. I wondered if the member wanted to elaborate a little bit more on some of her concerns about this government's track record with licence plates.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Well, I've had a lot of opportunity to stand in my place and talk about licence plates, interestingly enough, over the last four years. Interesting that the government is wanting to talk about licence plates when, every time we're on provincial roadways or in our neighbourhoods, we still see those blue reflective reminders of the ineptitude of this government that they couldn't get it right. Now, they are letting them continue to drive. Will those licence plates be automatically renewed? Who cares, right?

So my question to this government is, when you've got a bill here that says get it done, why on earth are you directing people's attention to licence plates again when you can't get them off the roads? You certainly couldn't get it done in that case. Four years later, we're still talking about them, and the government—those plates, while impossible to read, are also impossible to forget. So, maybe, the government could get it done when it comes to licence plates.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I'd like to return to the topic of fixed fees. We've heard a lot of members of this House—and I talk to many of my constituents—and they're concerned about affordability. They're concerned about prices going up, fees going up and government fees going up. I've heard many, many people express to me in my constituency, the riding of Essex, about municipal property taxes going up 6%, 7%, 8% in some instances.

But there is only one government that's freezing fees and lowering taxes, and that's the PC government of the province of Ontario. So I put this question to the member opposite: Is it not a good thing that we are freezing the fees? Isn't that a good thing?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The fee he's talking about, according to this bill, as he's mentioned, is the \$3.50 fee for each six-month period, equal to the already existing fee, and now we're fixing it to statute, which can be changed anytime somebody else wants to change it in statute. So freezing them, fixing them—it's the same as it was. The experience is the same across the community.

But if they want to talk about affordability, instead of removing tolls or preventing tolls where they don't exist, why don't you remove them where they do? We've got transport trucks on the 401. We could move a lot of them to the 407 if government had any sense of thinking about how to better utilize our existing provincial infrastructure—remove those tolls for transport trucks. Or, the region of Durham is asking for a temporary removal because of construction. We won't remove those fees for people in the community, and we are not removing tolls for the people of Durham region.

0910

So making life more affordable? What are you talking about? Where? How? In what way? You're keeping things the same. If you want to address affordability, there's a million different opportunities. If you wanted to address housing, health care, bring forward a bill of substance, but this is tinkering around the edges and not accomplishing anything. It's a giant nothing burger.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm kind of in-line with what the previous member was asking as to—people have some worries. People would like the government to get it done on things that matter to them. The number one thing that matters to a lot of people is fixing our health care system so that the 2.2 million Ontarians that don't have access to primary care do, so that the hundreds of thousands of people waiting for surgery get the care that they need. There is also a housing crisis that people would very much

like the government to focus on as well as an affordability crisis.

Do you see anything in this bill that will address the priorities of Ontarians with health care, with housing, with affordability?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, I don't. I will say, last night, I had the opportunity to join a meeting of the local chapter of the Ontario Health Coalition in Durham region. A lot of folks with either connection to the health care field or just community members who are starting to interact with the health care system in different ways and realizing it's not how it used to be, that it's not what they remember, that they can't access the services, and they're quite concerned.

This is a government that talks about freezing things? Bill 124 froze wages that forced the hospitals to be fleeced and held hostage by these nursing agencies that were not just able to get a tow hold, but to take over. So the hospitals are bleeding money to these agencies, instead of being able to pay their own nurses what they would want to through fair, collective bargaining. So this government did that. So they're standing here in a sort of sanctimonious presentation about making life better. It isn't.

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

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Today, this morning, we are talking about Bill 162. And Bill 162 has several schedules to it, and the primary purpose, from my point of view of Bill 162, is to address, in part, the issue of affordability.

As I was just saying a moment ago, there are several governments—municipal governments, the federal government—that are raising costs on the people of Ontario. For example, the federal government has raised costs on the people of Ontario by imposing a crushing carbon tax, which escalates on a regular basis higher, higher and higher—automatically.

Many municipal governments, for example, have imposed property tax increases—increases which are locked into your home, making home ownership more expensive. This is happening across the province of Ontario. But as I said earlier, only one government—only one government—is actually getting rid of fees and lowering taxes and that is the Progressive Conservative government of the province of Ontario.

Now, let's give a few examples of how we are lowering taxes, lowering fees and making life a little bit more affordable for people. We have introduced and then extended the 10-cent per litre reduction on the price of gasoline. That makes life more affordable when you drive to work. It makes life more affordable when you drive to school. It makes life more affordable when you drive to hockey practice, and we think that's important. Maybe other MPPs in this House don't think that's important.

We removed the fee on licence plate stickers. That saves the average family \$240 per year. That's \$240 per year you can put toward your savings. Maybe you wanted to buy something special for yourself or your children or maybe even contribute to their RESP. We think that \$240 per year makes life a little bit better.

We removed some tolls on highways, making driving less expensive. Now, it's more affordable to drive where you want to go. Perhaps you're taking a day trip or a modest vacation; now, it's a little bit more affordable for you.

We think that those are concrete and important steps toward making life more affordable for everybody. Many times, it makes the simple pleasures of life more affordable. I think we have taken a position in the PC caucus which is quite good and makes life a little better for everybody.

What else is addressed in this Bill 162 is the crushing carbon tax imposed by the federal Liberal government. In the PC caucus, we believe the carbon tax is very bad. In fact, we think it's so bad we fought it all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. That's how bad we think it is. We got no support from any opposition party in our opposition to the carbon tax. When we fought the carbon tax all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, the opposition did not help.

Do you know what the Supreme Court of Canada said? The Supreme Court of Canada said that despite our submissions, the federal Liberal government, constitutionally speaking, had the authority to impose a carbon tax on Ontario. That's what the Supreme Court of Canada said: The federal Liberal government had the right to impose that tax on Ontario.

We know the Liberals were very, very happy with that Supreme Court of Canada decision, because as we know, Liberals love taxes. Liberals think taxes cure all evils. In fact, we've heard it said, even in the assembly in the province of Ontario—this assembly here—we've heard it said by the Liberals; they think that the carbon tax makes the world more “habitable.” “Habitable” was the word that got used. A carbon tax makes the planet Earth more habitable—that was the argument put forward by the Liberals.

Madam Speaker, I thoroughly disagree with the Liberals. The carbon tax does not make the planet more habitable and never will. Now, let me tell you what does make the world more habitable. I'm going to reach back into the mists of time, way back to my ancient ancestors who were somewhere in Europe, hunting and gathering for their daily existence.

One day, one of my ancient ancestors woke up, and he said, “Today is the day. Today is the day when things change. I am not going to hunt and gather anymore. Today, I'm going to delve into the earth, dig into the dirt, and I am going to find precious things inside the Earth. Then, I'm going to take them out, and I'm going to use those precious things, and I'm going to make fascinating and important things out of them.” That ancient ancestor of mine was the first miner in my family.

Do you know what that ancestor did? I don't know what his name was, I don't know where he did it, but he took something out of the earth. Maybe it was copper. Then, he fashioned it into a bowl, and he gave it to his wife, and she used it to cook the meals for the family. Then, he took more copper; he fashioned it into a knife. He gave it to his

son, and that son used the knife to cut wheat or to cut berries or to cut food for the family. Maybe he had more copper. He gave it to his daughter, and she used it to fashion beautiful instruments, ornaments to make things more beautiful. Those things were then fashioned and shared with others, and the whole tribe became more convenient. Everything for the tribe got better, and advances were even quadrupled after that.

0920

My ancestor could have left that copper in the ground, but he didn't. He took it out of the ground. He made things with it, shared it with his family, his tribe, his nation, and things got better. That is how the Earth got more habitable.

The Earth got more habitable because people took things, they mined things out of the ground, and they used human ingenuity to make life better. That's how I say life gets better. That's how I say the world gets more habitable, but the Liberals disagree, and I think the NDP disagree, too.

I think their opinion, among the NDP and the Liberal caucus, is that carbon taxes make life more habitable. I think that's their theory. In fact, they've repeated it several times, haven't they? They've done it over and over again.

Not more than 10 minutes ago, when I was speaking about freezing fees, they were saying, “How does that make life better?” It makes life better because it makes life more affordable. That's why it makes life better.

You can ridicule the freezing of fees, but my constituents appreciate it. My constituents appreciate it when they walk into a ServiceOntario office, and the fee is the same as it was last year and the year before and the year before and they're not being constantly nickel-and-dimed and gouged. They appreciate that, and I do too, because that's what makes life more affordable.

The carbon tax does not make life more affordable.

Let me give you a few examples of how the carbon tax, imposed by the federal Liberal government and absolutely adored by the members of the Liberal caucus, makes life less affordable, makes things worse for people.

I've asked my constituents to give me examples of their heating bill, something which is absolutely necessary in everyday life—heating your home, which makes life more habitable.

The bill that I received from Meghan in my riding, a bill of \$250.55, had a carbon tax of \$71.86—28% carbon tax.

Here's the bill I received from Peter, a \$251 bill—\$73 of carbon tax. That's 29% carbon tax.

Here's a bill that I received from Eric, a \$277 bill—\$81 of carbon tax. That's 29% carbon tax on a heating bill.

The bill that I received from Audrey, a \$203 bill—\$57 of carbon tax. That's 28% carbon tax, just to heat your home.

I ask the question, who can afford to live that way? Who can afford to heat your home when 28% and 29% of what you pay to heat your home is carbon tax? That's not going to make life better. That's not going to make life more affordable. That doesn't make the Earth habitable.

I sincerely hope that the members of the Liberal caucus are listening intently to everything that I say, because I

want every single one of them over there, who are listening very intently to every single word I say, to understand how bad the federal Liberal carbon tax is—having a bad effect on the families in the riding of Essex. That’s what I want them to understand.

We tested this in a vote recently, approximately two weeks ago. We tested it, and it was a vote on the carbon tax; more specifically, it was a vote to remove the carbon tax. And what happened during that vote? Every PC caucus member voted to kill the carbon tax, because that’s what we want. We want to scrap the carbon tax. That’s what we want. We make it plain and obvious. We stand up in our place and we do it.

I noticed that there was a brand new member in the House, the member from Kitchener Centre. She had barely been in the House three days—three days; a brand new member—and even that member was sufficiently educated on the issue that she stood up in her place and she let her vote be counted. Now, I don’t agree with how she voted, but I concede that she stood up in her place and she voted. She took a stand, as many members of this House did.

But what didn’t happen was—the Liberals didn’t take a stand. The Liberals bravely abstained. I use phrase “bravely abstained” facetiously. How can you not have opinions on the carbon tax? When your constituents send you here to speak on their behalf and vote on their behalf and even a brand new member votes in her place, how can you not vote? One would have thought that the Liberals would have an opinion on this topic.

That brings me to the portion of Bill 162 which is schedule 5. Schedule 5 proposes that any time a provincial government seeks to try imposing a new carbon tax, they shall be subject to schedule 5. And schedule 5 says that they have to take the issue to the voters. There’s a phrase for that; it’s called direct democracy. I think a little bit of democracy—maybe even direct democracy—is a good thing. This is a very common thing all around the world: direct democracy. I would like to know if there is anybody in this House opposed to some form of democracy.

Now I want to refer to some very thoughtful and insightful comments made by a newspaper writer. You’ll notice that I rarely quote newspaper writers in this assembly. Some people like to do that. I don’t. But I have a really great newspaper in my riding. That really great newspaper is call the Essex Free Press. Some people read other newspapers, maybe they don’t read the newspaper, but I read the Essex Free Press. It’s a great newspaper.

I don’t know who people take advice from. There are some people I think in the NDP caucus who take advice from a newspaper or an article or a journal called the Narwhal. I have never read the Narwhal. I don’t think I ever read anything written by an Arctic sea animal. I don’t think an Arctic sea animal is the kind of journal that I would read. But you know, I like to read a newspaper by somebody who lives in my riding, maybe a talented person who lives the kind of lifestyle I live, a hard-working person, down-to-earth, a person who cares about her community. She is able to speak to me and I’m able to

speak to her eye to eye. We know each other. This person’s name is Sylene Argent.

I had a great conversation with Sylene Argent. Let me tell you what Sylene Argent wrote in the Essex Free Press. This is what she said, and this is very important: “I don’t want to rely on rebates. I don’t want to depend on the government for a subsidy here and there, when we can do a better job at looking at how we can reduce costs to make living essentials affordable, while also considering the environment.” That’s what Sylene Argent wrote.

I found that very interesting because I thought there was a lot of common sense in there. She is talking about how we can reduce costs, making living essentials more affordable. I say we can lower the tax on gas, and we did that, by 10 cents a litre. I say we can get rid of the fee on licence plate stickers, and we did that. I say we can get rid of tolls on highways, and we’ve done that, too. These are all ways to reduce costs and to make life more affordable on the essentials. Sylene Argent says so, and I agree with her.

0930

Sylene says that we must also consider the environment, and I agree with her on that too.

Let me tell you about one of the most important environmental initiatives in the history of the province of Ontario. This government is helping to convert steel-making furnaces in the province of Ontario. They’re going to be converted to electric arc furnaces. What that means is, once that’s completed, those electric arc furnaces are going to help produce steel in the province of Ontario. At the same time, it is the equivalent of removing two million automobiles off the roads of this province.

I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again: I’m not old enough to remember Premier Mike Harris. I’m not old enough to remember Premier Bob Rae. But of all the Premiers in the history of the province of Ontario, the one Premier who has taken the most important step to improve the environment of the province of Ontario, by removing the equivalent of two million automobiles off the roads, is the Premier we have today, Premier Doug Ford. That is correct. He is the one who has taken the single most important positive environmental step in the entire history of the province of Ontario.

I’d like to say to Sylene and to the other common-sense people in the riding of Essex, the people I represent, especially the people in the small towns—small towns like McGregor, River Canard, Cottam, St. Joachim and Woodslee—I read your newspaper, and your newspaper is for you, and this PC government has heard you. We’re going to keep costs down and try to make life more affordable for everyone, and it’s these steps that we’re taking in Bill 162 that are going to help us achieve that type of goal—a goal which will make life a little bit more habitable for you and for your family and for your children. I’d like to thank the people in those small communities, and I’d like to thank Sylene Argent of the Essex Free Press for her thoughtful words.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member from Essex for his comments. I often find the member's eloquence very entertaining, for sure. It was like a National Geographic commercial—a lot of anthropology trips down memory lane there.

The member made a case that the Premier we currently have is one of most environmental Premiers ever. I actually wonder, from one perspective, if he isn't good at recycling our time, because we spent 72 hours in this place undoing legislation that the members opposite have proposed. Let's go through it, shall we? Bill 124, Bill 28, the greenbelt fiasco, the urban boundary dispute. The Premier is famous for recycling—but recycling hot air in this place. I'm wondering if it's embarrassing, frankly, to be part of a government that brings legislation into the House only to redo it later. I think it's a waste of our time. I think it's a waste of time to be using the lawyers hired to serve the province of Ontario to go fight court cases that are unwinnable.

So I'm wondering, because the member has talked about making life more habitable, if he thinks it wouldn't be more habitable for this House to be working on legislation that doesn't just have to get ripped up a few months later.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: On the subject of court cases and on another decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, I note that in a court case which this PC government undertook to defend responsible government in the province of Ontario, the Supreme Court of Canada said the following: "In Canada's constitutional democracy, the confidentiality of cabinet deliberations is a precondition to responsible government.... Responsible government is a fundamental principle of Canada's system of government...." That is from the Supreme Court of Canada, in a case which this government undertook to defend, defending the principles of democracy against an attack by the CBC. We had to fight that all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, and we won, because on this side, in this caucus, the PC caucus, we believe that responsible government and democratic traditions are very—

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

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to our member for mentioning the work this government has been trying to do to get life more affordable. The people in Richmond Hill have been complaining about how everything has been so expensive, and I'm happy that this bill is getting to it with making life more affordable—with the exception of the carbon tax.

I just cannot understand why we still have this problem of the carbon tax. People in Richmond Hill have been complaining as they go to the gas pump, and they didn't even realize about the heating problem—29%. How can we work on this, getting rid of the carbon tax?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member from Richmond Hill for that question, and I thank her for advocating on behalf of her constituents, who want a more affordable life. She's doing a fine job doing that.

All of us together fighting the carbon tax will make a difference, because at a certain point something has to

give. We can't have carbon taxes of 28% and 29% on people's heating bills. We live in a cold country. People need to heat their homes. We can't have a federally imposed carbon tax, loved by the Liberals, pretending that they're making life better for anyone through a tax.

Everybody knows this is not working. Everybody in Richmond Hill knows this is not working. The federal Liberal carbon tax has to die. We have to kill that tax. The PC government of the province of Ontario says, scrap the carbon tax.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's hard to figure out where to begin with the comments from my colleague from Essex, so let's do a history lesson here, because they are saying the carbon tax is not their tax.

My colleague talked eloquently about the backtracking this government does. When the current Conservatives were elected to form government, we had cap-and-trade, which meant the big polluters—industry—paid for carbon emissions. This government came in and scrapped that and brought in the carbon tax. And so it is really—"comical" is the word I'm going to use, because the other word is unparliamentary—that the member opposite is talking about how great they are, because they went to the Supreme Court fighting the carbon tax, when it was your carbon tax.

In essence, what we have seen is another example of something like the greenbelt, where the government does something, gets caught, the public doesn't like it, and they pretend they're taking a hard stance and going in the opposite direction. I will remind the member opposite: Two days ago—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Thank you. Response?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: And there you have it, Madam Speaker: The NDP say, "Well, maybe the carbon tax is not a good thing. Let's do cap-and-trade." Cap-and-trade equals carbon tax. Cap-and-trade is carbon tax. Cap-and-trade caps and trades. It's carbon tax. And they love that, right? They disguise their language.

But let me talk about the Supreme Court of Canada judgment that we actually fought all the way to the Supreme Court against the carbon tax. They didn't support us doing that either, right? They didn't want to fight the carbon tax, but the Supreme Court of Canada said it's a federal Liberal carbon tax, and the federal Liberal carbon tax was imposed by Justin Trudeau and the federal government had the right to do that. Now, you can argue with me all day long, but you can't argue with the Supreme Court of Canada.

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

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's great to have the member from Essex here. We can see how the people of south-western Ontario support our government in electing you as our first member for Essex in many, many years, replacing the current opposition's member from the NDP.

We know where they stand on affordability. We know where the opposition stands. The NDP and the Liberals never saw a tax or a fee they didn't want to hike, whether it's tolls, taxes, energy costs.

We've taken many initiatives within this government. Could I ask the member, how and what in this particular bill—how is it going to help regular families? How is it going to help them save costs in driving their kids to soccer etc.? How is it going to save money and put money back in their pocketbooks?

0940

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member from Oakville for that question. Clearly, he's standing up for his constituency. He wants to fight the carbon tax, just like me. He's standing up for a more affordable lifestyle. I thank him for joining us in that fight.

One of the things that this government is doing under this legislation is freezing fees. That's going to make life more affordable because, as you know, some municipalities across this province are increasing their property taxes, some as much as 6% or 7% or 8%. We're not going to let that happen with provincial fees. We're going to freeze the provincial fees. In fact, this is the only government that I can think of at the present time—between the federal government and the municipalities—that's actually lowering fees and lowering taxes.

I thank that member from Oakville for joining us in making life more affordable.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the member from Essex: This newest attempt of a Conservative bill has nothing to do with making life affordable as far as I'm concerned. It eliminates tolls that do not exist while ignoring the tolls that do exist, all in the name of making life more affordable, yet the only highway in Ontario raising their tolls in 2024 is the 407, the legacy of this PC government. However, instead of fixing that mistake or removing the tolls from the portion the province owns, they are choosing tokenism over real action.

How does the government justify these actions as sufficient responses to Ontario's urgent housing crisis, health care system strains and the rising cost of living? I'm sure you see it all in your riding. Please explain to the people of Ontario how this Conservative government is going to make life more affordable besides getting rid of tolls that don't exist.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member for that question, but I'll just remind the member that at the federal level, where the federal Liberal government imposed the carbon tax, they are kept in power by her cousins. They're kept in power by her NDP cousins in Ottawa. The fastest way to get rid of the carbon tax would be for the member from St. Catharines to pick up the phone, call your buddies in Ottawa and tell them to get rid of the carbon tax. But you won't pick up the phone and call your friends in Ottawa. You won't pick up the phone and call the NDP—

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

MPP Jamie West: What an interesting morning. We're debating Bill 162, the Get It Done Act. I actually prefer the member for Oshawa's expression of the "giant nothing burger act." I think that's right on the nose. This is basically a nothing bill. I know the members opposite are going to criticize me. They're going to point out a couple of little, tiny things. But honestly, the number one issue since 2022, when all of us were elected or re-elected, is affordability. Freezing a fee that already exists, these minor little steps that you're doing, is insulting to the people of Ontario.

This weekend, I was going to make sausages for my kids. We like to barbecue a little bit. I stopped by the grocery store, and a pack of buns was seven bucks. I can afford seven bucks, but I am not spending seven bucks on a pack of hot dog buns, so we had something else for dinner. That's the reality for people; it's not that things are slightly more expensive.

Don't tell me it's the carbon tax forcing Galen Weston to gouge me for seven bucks for a pack of buns. It's a greedy grocer gouging me. When you knock on doors, and you tell people that it's not because you're letting greedy Galen Weston get away with this, you are insulting their intelligence, and they'll call you out for it.

This is a pretend bill. This is to slow down the conversations about the greenbelt scandal and the RCMP investigations. There are things that we could be doing—should be doing—here that would help people have better lives. That's what we should be talking about this morning.

This morning I had an interview with the CBC, and we were talking about the wildland firefighters. Why don't they have presumptive cancer coverage? We did it for urban firefighters, and I think it's great that we did it. I want to thank Jeff Burch for that. I want to thank the Minister of Labour, the previous one and the new one—I'm not playing favourites. This is what we can do for people that makes their lives better, that makes their families better.

Wildland firefighters being told to put a wet handkerchief over their mouths—that doesn't do anything. And I'll be honest with you, I doubt they do that, because when you tell someone to do something ridiculous, that doesn't make sense, they're not going to do it.

For more than 200 days, these workers have been asking the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, "Can we have some decent PPE to protect ourselves?" The forest firefighter season has started already in Alberta. It's going to be starting here soon. It was raining yesterday—in February. Asking for PPE for more than 200 days: There is silence. They have to do a written recommendation and still wait another 21 days for a response—silence. "Can we have the same presumptive coverage that the urban firefighters have?" Silence.

I brought forward an amendment to Bill 149 on this. Why don't we just include them, all firefighters, treat them all the same? I told the Conservative government, "Look, if the argument is that they're outdoors instead of indoors and they're not going to be affected the same way, it won't cost you anything. But if it isn't accurate, if they are dying

and suffering from an occupational disease, you could allow that to happen with dignity.”

The Conservative government voted again that amendment. The Conservative government won't answer the phone calls of wildland firefighters.

We could be doing this. We could be debating this this morning. We could each speak for 20 minutes, and we could all vote on voice and get it through and help these people today. But, instead, we have this big nothing burger—nothing burger. The member for Oshawa thought I stole it, but I said this is what the bill should be called. This is a nothing burger bill, and you can tell this because the Conservative member earlier when debating, half of his debate was about a Stone Age man finding copper, somehow inventing the smelting process during the Stone Age, and going to hunter-gatherers. That definitely has nothing to do with this bill. There's nothing in this.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: You hurt me.

MPP Jamie West: I'm not trying to hurt you; I'm trying to explain to you that—the member opposite says, “You hurt me,” but I'm not trying to insult you. I'm just saying, we're going to be at PDAC next week. Please, when you go to the prospectors and developers mining conference, don't tell them that Stone Age people were smelting copper—please, please.

There has been so much walking back of issues on this bill. We've had to walk back Bill 124—but not immediately. I stood here several times and said, “This is unconstitutional. You're going to lose.” And when you lost, I said, “It's unconstitutional. You're going to lose.” Then you appealed and I said, “You're going to lose the appeal.”

Even after the appeal, you didn't walk it back. You were kind of non-committal and then waited for a Friday afternoon, when no one was paying attention, to walk it back. I haven't seen this much walking back since Michael Jackson invented the moonwalk. It is unbelievable.

Gilles Bisson was the member for Timmins. Gilles Bisson described the government as “ready, fire, aim.” You have done nothing but prove that time and time again: Bill 124. Bill 28. Bill 28 is—I remember the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour high-fiving each other when it passed—high-fiving each other. We were talking about workers going to food banks. These are workers who work for the government going to food banks with their kids, workers moving back in with their parents with their kids, and the Conservative government is stepping on their necks to force through this terrible deal. They walked that back in less than 24 hours.

0950

The greenbelt scandal they had to walk back. The greenbelt scandal: We keep being told we have all the facts, but just, I think Monday, the Leader of the Opposition, our leader, New Democratic leader Marit Stiles, was finding out there's new information that was given to the Integrity Commissioner that was reported untruthfully. At what point do you think you'll have the trust of the people? There's that line from Bob Marley where you can fool some people some of the time but you can't fool all people

all the time. I don't think you could fool anybody any of the time at this point.

The greenbelt, the urban boundary scandal—again and again, you get caught with your hand in the cookie jar and you're like, “I'm sorry.” But listen, in this bill we need to be talking about health care and housing and the skyrocketing cost of living.

In 2022, every single door that all of us knocked on—every single door—they told me, they told you “affordability.” “I cannot believe how expensive it is.” And you have done little baby steps, but nothing substantial that makes life easier for these people. It continues to get worse. In my riding, and I'm sure in your riding as well, what I've heard more and more over the last six months is that it has never been this bad. It doesn't matter if I'm talking to non-profits, it doesn't matter if I'm talking to middle class, if I'm talking to wealthy people, if I'm talking to doctors—it doesn't matter who I'm talking to—I keep hearing that it has never been this bad, and that's a mouthful because in the Liberal government that went from a majority to losing party status, it was pretty bad. It was really bad, Speaker.

People were looking for a change, looking for hope. Now, we were hopeful it was going to be us, but they selected the Conservative government. What they wanted was change, what they wanted was life to get better, and more than half a decade later it has never been this bad. You can't keep blaming the Liberal government after five years, after six years. It's not their mess anymore, it's yours.

We should be focused on affordability. We should be focused on health care. When I ran for the first time, in 2018, we talked about hallway medicine and how bad hallway medicine was—and it was particularly bad in Sudbury. We're still struggling in Sudbury, but now it's become the norm everywhere. In 2018, when we were talking about hallway medicine, we weren't talking about operating rooms closing. We weren't talking about ERs closing. We were talking about closing hospitals, but that's what we're talking about today after five-plus years of this Conservative government.

I was talking to students yesterday—this is about how we should be talking about housing—and telling them that when I went to school, I was a full-time student. I worked on the weekends and had my own apartment. I made a little more than minimum wage. I didn't make a ton, but I had my own apartment. I was a full-time student and only worked on weekends. If I worked any other shift, it was just sort of extra money to pick up a jean jacket or whatever was cool at the time. I can't imagine any student now not working several jobs. I can't imagine any student today who doesn't have several roommates if they're not living at home with their parents. How can we get people to have more affordable, better-paying jobs if we can't make it easier for them to get the education they need, to get the training they need? Why is the government putting more and more hurdles in front of people? Why are these students paying the highest tuitions and getting the lowest funding? And to brag about this—I know they brag about

this, Speaker—we froze tuition. You froze it at the highest across the country.

Interjection: And reduced it.

MPP Jamie West: You reduced it. It's still the highest across the country. It's still the highest and by a long shot. It's not a little bit. I think you have to increase it by 40% to catch up to the next province. I could be wrong, but it's somewhere around there, 30%, 40% to catch up the next lowest. So we're at the bottom of the barrel. There's no embarrassment. The heckle was, "And reduced it."

There are 2.2 million people without primary care in this province, and I'm one of them. We had the Ontario Medical Association come talk to us, and in the middle of the meeting, they were telling me about how people are exiting primary care, about doctors who don't want to be family physicians anymore because of the amount of paperwork they have to do, about the struggle we're having to get primary care all across Ontario. It used to be a northern Ontario issue, and now it's everywhere—2.2 million people looking for family doctors, looking for primary care. I don't have a doctor either. I'm relatively healthy. I don't go to the doctor that often. My doctor retired.

There are a lot of people, I think, in Canada who deserve primary health care, who take for granted that you should have a doctor—even people who are healthy—that if I need to see a doctor, I should have a doctor.

Dr. Garrioch, God bless him—once you get to your seventies, you want a little family time. Dr. Garrioch has been taking care of me since I was 15. Maybe it's time to retire. He has had a full career.

Where are the new doctors? We don't invest in it. We don't encourage it.

Bill 124 crippled our health care industry. In the middle of a health care crisis, we treated health care workers, lab technicians, nurses, the people who provide our primary care in the hospitals—the Conservative government treated them like dirt. Those who could retire retired. Those who could retire early retired early. Those who could leave left, and they left for other provinces that treated them better. And when they rescinded Bill 124, the Conservative government didn't even have the grace to let these workers know that it's gone, so that more of them don't leave.

There are simple things we can do for affordability. In Bill 149, there's a digital workers' rights protection act that gives these digital app workers the right to be paid less than minimum wage—enshrines it into law. Basically, it tells you, if you're an app worker, you do not have the right to the Employment Standards Act; you don't have the right to the Labour Relations Act; you have no other rights that other workers are allowed; and that these multi-billion dollar companies can get away with paying you about six bucks an hour—sometimes as low as two bucks an hour, after your expenses. You can complain about it, but they have the right to do it, so that complaint won't go anywhere. We could fix that. That would help ten of thousands of these workers. It would change their lives today. We're not doing that. We're colouring around the edges. "What can we say in the news that sounds good but doesn't

accomplish anything?" That's the theme of almost every bill we debate here—"Let's give it a catchy title, but have nothing in the middle." All sizzle, no steak.

I was meeting yesterday with fruit and vegetable wholesalers, importers, who provide fruit and vegetables for almost all of southern Ontario—a really amazing organization. One of the things they were telling me was that insurance rates for trucking have gone through the roof; that if you want to help keep the price of food down, if you want to help business survive in Ontario, you've got to do something about these insurance companies that are gouging our trucking industry.

We saw this two years ago, when the insurance companies were gouging the snowplow companies, and all these small snowplow companies—these farmers who take care of the churches in their communities aren't able to do it anymore because the insurance rates are so high. Some of these industries who are doing snowplowing—they have to go to Lloyd's of London to get insurance, and we're talking about millions of dollars of insurance. So the little guy is falling out of it, and even the bigger players are trying to find ways to sell to somebody else, because the insurance company keeps coming back for another chunk and another chunk. There's no one looking into that gouging.

There's no one looking into the food price gouging. We know it exists. This would help people.

1000

A couple of times this morning, Speaker, I've heard the Conservative government brag about how they're freezing fees and how municipalities are raising property taxes. It is unfair to the municipalities to blame them for raising property taxes because the Conservative government is downloading developer fees: \$5 billion worth of developer fees have been downloaded to the municipalities, fees that used to be collected and given to the municipalities, but now the municipality has to make up that shortfall. And a municipality can't run a deficit, so the only thing they can do when the Conservative government at the provincial level says, "Hey, take the hit for \$5 billion," is reduce services or increase fees.

I said it before, I'll say it again, I'll continue to say it, that when you look at your property taxes and you're mad at them going up, save some of that blame that you're aiming at your mayor and city council and put it where it belongs: the Conservative government. They made that call in record unaffordability. They said, "Wealthy developers shouldn't have to pay anymore; you pay for it instead." That's not fair to people.

A lot of this bill Speaker—I said "a giant nothing burger" before, from the member for Oshawa, but a lot of this bill really can be, "It's the same as it ever was"—the "same as it ever was" bill. Let's remove tolls from places where there's no tolls. Why don't we remove tolls for the trucking industry to get on the 407 so we can move things around quicker, so we can help industry, so we can help business? Why don't we, for the 407—I wish the Conservative government hadn't sold it off so many years ago—collect \$1 billion that they owe us instead of waiving

it and saying, “We’ve got this one. We’ll pick up that cheque. It’s just a billion dollars. Don’t worry; our taxpayers will pay for it”? Why don’t we allow transport trucks on the 407—waive those tolls, allow people to drive? Less transport trucks on other roads, more people driving around—that’s not part of it.

One of them has to do with licence plate fees. They’re going to enable automatic licence plate renewal. I talked about backtracking before. The reason they have to do this is because people were getting tickets because they hadn’t renewed it. The Conservative government removed the cost but forgot to implement a system where people were reminded to renew, and so people didn’t and were getting pulled over. They also did the same thing for the health cards. People were going to hospital for emergency care with expired health cards. This isn’t you doing an amazing new thing, this is you fixing a mess that you made before. This bill is a giant nothing burger.

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

Mr. Brian Riddell: So you’re all over the place talking about everything, but what I really want to know is why you can’t commit to saying that the carbon tax is not good for the people of Ontario. Why can’t you say that?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): A reminder to all people in the Legislature to ask the questions through the Chair.

Back to the member for Sudbury.

MPP Jamie West: The member from Cambridge is asking about the carbon tax. Honestly, what we’ve heard since October of last year is carbon tax and carbon tax and carbon tax. The Conservative government at the provincial level wants the people of Ontario to think that they’re fighting for them, but do you know what they’re doing, Speaker? They are petitioning us to write a really stern letter to the federal government. That’s the authority we have at this level. This is a strawman argument. We’re going to get a fancy ostrich-feathered pen, and we’re going to write a letter, or maybe we’ll do a fancy font or something.

This sounds like you’re fighting for affordability for people, but you’re not. The things you could do for people that are not performative, that are not writing a stern letter, where you can have people make at least minimum wage and not get ripped off by their employer while you can go after wage theft—that you ignore. But everything else, it’s just fluster.

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

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague from Sudbury, who used to be my wingman here on the other side. I think that your insight to the people of Ontario in trying to really explain how we can make life more affordable from this side is really, really a good way of putting it. And considering the high level of performative and talkative pieces in the Get It Done Act or the latest attempt from the Conservative government to bring forward a bill that maybe should be called “trying to get it right for once,” what alternative measures would you propose to effectively tackle the pressing issues of real

affordability, like housing affordability, health care accessibility and the cost of living for all Ontarians? How would we really tackle that?

MPP Jamie West: It’s hard to answer in just a minute, but one thing we can do very quickly is we can limit the number of private nursing staff agencies. There is a need for them in certain circumstances, but in this instance, where we can afford to pay these private nursing staff agencies, the sky is the limit and there are members of the Conservative Party who have ties to these private staffing agencies, this is a conflict of interest but it’s also not a good use of our public dollars.

If we can hire workers making a decent wage, we should pay them the decent wage. We shouldn’t pay an agency an extra \$1,500 on top of that to provide the services. That would be better for us. That would bring our taxes down. That would be more affordable for hospitals and health care.

We could build affordable housing and define what it means and not pretend it is affordable and say things like “attainable.” The newest iPhone is attainable but not affordable to everybody.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for his comments. He touched on a number of different subjects, and I heard him say that it has never been this bad before. I certainly understand why folks might think that because we haven’t had this type of price pressure and inflation for a long, long time. But you can tell from the colour of my hair, I’ve been around and seen it before. In the 1980s, inflation was in the teens, interest rates were 19%, 20%. My first mortgage was 10.5% and I thought I had won the lottery. These periods of price pressure happen.

My question to the member is—he is from a northern area; I’m from a rural area. The carbon tax: If you live in the GTA, you’ve got a choice. You’ve got transit you can take, or not drive. That makes sense. But in rural and northern areas, we’ve got no choice. Our farmers have no choice. They’ve got to drive their vehicle and drive their crops. Parents taking their kids to school have got no choice, they’ve got to drive. So doesn’t the member agree that this bill will support families by keeping costs down?

MPP Jamie West: Two things very quickly: This carbon tax is a provincial carbon tax. The Conservative government brought this in. Basically, when it was brought through by the federal Liberals, if you didn’t sign up for your own at a provincial level, the money went federally and got back to you. So the Conservative governments owns this tax. It’s theirs.

The other thing is, all this bill does is say, if you’re going to bring something in, there’s going to be a referendum. It is sabre-rattling. It doesn’t amount to anything. It is just pretending you are doing something. We can stop talking about this, this thing that we don’t have direct control over, and we can help people put money in their pockets by doing simple things like removing the digital workers’ rights protection act so people can make minimum wage per hour and not less than minimum wage.

That's what we need to focus on: putting money in people's pockets in a substantial way and not colouring around the edges.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank my friend from Sudbury for those remarks. As I ask the member a question, I just want to acknowledge that the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario are in the building today. I see Doris Grinspun there; I see other friends I had the privilege to have breakfast with this morning. Thank you for being here. You are inspiring me to ask my friend about what this bill could do.

This bill we have in front of us could be called the "retread act" because we've spent 72 hours in this place debating legislation which later gets withdrawn while our hospitals are suffering, while our practices are suffering. Unfortunately, we had a lot of great proposals for primary care that came out of Ottawa. We've had one funded for a terrific bunch of nurse practitioners, Hoda and Joanna and that team. But we have 150,000 people in our city, in our larger Ottawa region, without access to primary care, Speaker, and there is absolutely nothing in the "retread act" to help those folks. There's gimmicks and bobbles.

So I'm wondering if the member from Sudbury has the same experience. Should we have action on primary care instead of hot air on retread?

1010

MPP Jamie West: We absolutely should. Look, I mentioned it earlier—I don't know if the nurses were here when I talked about it—but the quickest thing we can do is get rid of these private staffing agencies, or at least reduce the use so that they're only used in situations where they used to be used. We have to show respect to the nursing agency that's there.

Bill 124, for 53 months, punished nurses—for 53 months. The Conservative government didn't have the dignity to do a press conference when they repealed it after losing a court challenge and losing an appeal.

Hon. Stan Cho: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the member from Sudbury.

I recognize the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Stan Cho: It's great to have the RAO here. I look forward to chatting with them later. But despite the pandering of the opposition there, it has absolutely nothing to do with the bill at hand.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I will go back to the member from Sudbury for a response.

MPP Jamie West: We call that speaking truth to power, Speaker.

Look, the reality is that Bill 124 was harmful to the health care industry. People are exiting in rapid numbers. If they did the press conference, maybe nurses would know that it's been repealed and those workers would stop exiting the province, knowing that we're going to finally pay them what they're worth.

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

Mr. Ric Bresee: Thank you to the member from Sudbury for his comments today.

We all know that this House and the comments made in this House are often replete with some rhetoric and intentions. Sometimes, as the previous question just indicated, they go off in a direction of what could be, should be, possibly might be in some future bill, certainly.

But I want to give the member an opportunity to correct something. At the beginning of his speech, he said that he was arguing in favour of supporting the wildfire forest firefighters getting defined. He said that this government was silent on it, but if I may read directly from Hansard, Speaker. His seatmate asked the question, "With wildfire season anticipated to start early this year, will the government finally do the right thing and classify forest rangers as firefighters?" That was the question from your own member. The answer from Minister Piccini was, "A short answer to the member opposite: Yes." So I guess this government isn't silent on these matters.

MPP Jamie West: I heard it that day, and I am very hopeful the minister is going to do something. Why aren't we debating that bill today? Why are we debating this fluff-of-nothing bill, this nothing burger bill, when what we could be debating right now is providing occupational health and safety hazard, WSIB compensation to these workers, PPE for these workers? Why are we dragging this down? Why are we spending 72 hours in this place walking back your garbage bills when we could be helping workers in the workplaces of Ontario who are fighting forest fires in northern Ontario with a hanky across their mouth while you twiddle your thumbs and pretend you're doing something? The Minister of Labour said yes, but then sat on his hands.

I can't wait for the standing ovation because I love watching you guys give a standing ovation while sitting on your hands.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Well, that was a lively little debate.

It is now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SPORTS AND RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Mr. John Jordan: This government recently announced capital funding to non-profit organizations across the province to ensure communities have safe and ready access to vital programming, activities and spaces.

My thanks to Minister Lumsden and the work the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport does along with the Ontario Trillium Foundation to support and improve infrastructure—everything from purchasing equipment and building new spaces to retrofits or repairs.

Speaker, a total of 12 organizations in my riding of Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston received funding—organiz-

ations like YAK Youth Services in Perth. With their funding, they're upgrading their kitchen facilities, so they can continue to make healthy meals and snacks and provide a safe and supportive place for youth.

The Carleton Place Curling Club will use its grant to purchase and install a new chiller to allow the club to remain operational for recreation, gatherings and emergencies.

The Montague and District Seniors Forget-Me-Not Club will use its funding to make infrastructure improvements to the only space in the community for seniors' programs and events.

Earlier this year, I had the honour of meeting with councillors and community volunteers at the new covered outdoor rink in Sharbot Lake.

Speaker, this government will continue to help build healthy and vibrant communities throughout Ontario by strengthening the impact of the province's non-profit sector and supporting social determinants of health. Congratulations to all organizations in my riding that received funding and thank you for all your contributions to the people in your community.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, on this last day of February, I want to congratulate the London Black History Month coordinating committee for a fantastic lineup of events.

There was the wonderful and moving opening gala at Museum London, where a new On the Spot app was launched chronicling the history of Black communities in the London area since the early 1820s.

There was the third annual Essence and Culture Awards, an inspiring celebration of Black excellence and a showcase for the extraordinary talents of Black Londoners. Kudos to Colin Caleb and Michelle Brissette, and all the ECA board members, for a phenomenal evening.

There was the premiere of a new documentary about the Fugitive Slave Chapel, built in 1848 as a place of worship for former slaves who fled to Canada on the Underground Railroad, which was restored and relocated last summer to Fanshawe Pioneer Village.

There was the thrilling performance of Freedom: The Spirit and Legacy of Black Music with London Symphonia at the magnificent Metropolitan United Church. The show was created for the Stratford Festival by the multi-talented Beau Dixon, a graduate of London South Collegiate Institute in London West.

February also saw the Fugitive Slave Chapel and the Metropolitan United Church performance space recognized by the Lieutenant Governor, with two of just four provincial and highly prestigious Excellence in Conservation awards.

Many thanks to all the London Black History Month coordinating committee volunteers for such amazing opportunities to learn, engage and be inspired.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. David Smith: I rise to acknowledge that, throughout the month of February, Ontarians celebrate Black History Month for the many great accomplishments and contributions of people of African descent to Ontario's economy and safety in the areas of research and development, medicine, business, education, sports, festivals, politics and much more.

We celebrated these accomplishments through our ancestral ways of libation, singing, dancing, drumming, poetry and merriment together only last Tuesday at Queen's Park, with many in attendance, from our Premier, Doug Ford, to our stakeholders, constituents, members of the Legislative Assembly, legislative staff and many community members, including staff and volunteers. I thank you all for supporting the event with your presence, efforts and speeches to make the event a resounding success.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank our sponsors: Mr. Chris Campbell of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America; Mr. Ivan Dawns of the international union of painters; Mr. Roodney Clarke of the plumbers and pipefitters union; Ms. Danielle Cantave of Ubuntu Arts; Mr. Chef TEE of Greelz; and Mrs. Julia Bebiem of Grandieu Events and Management.

I'd like to thank all—

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

The next statement.

MEDSCHECK PROGRAM

Ms. Sandy Shaw: While our federal New Democrat counterparts won pharmacare for Canadians, ensuring access to medication for those who need it, this provincial government is instead allowing huge corporations like Galen Weston and Loblaws to siphon money from our public health care for private profit.

Yesterday, we learned through investigative reporting that Shoppers Drug Mart is pressuring staff to bill for unnecessary and unprompted medication reviews. Here's an example: A woman received a random call from her pharmacy at Shoppers to check if she was still using her inhalers for asthma. She said yes and the call ended in under five minutes. She later learned that Shoppers billed Ontario MedsCheck for that unsolicited call.

1020

Ontario MedsCheck—or medication reviews—when done correctly, is a great service. But Shoppers isn't doing it correctly. It seems that they are doing it not for the patient, but for profit.

It gets even worse: Each MedsCheck creates more administrative work on a frustrated and shrinking group of physicians who have to sign off on every record of a MedsCheck call.

Like many of its other decisions, this government has a proven record of working for insiders and huge corporations like Walmart and Staples. Big surprise: The person

this government appointed as the director of pandemic response worked as a lobbyist for Shoppers Drug Mart.

So maybe you're one of the 2.3 million Ontarians who don't have a family doc, or maybe you're stuck waiting in an emergency room with minor medical issues because you can't get a family doc. If that's the case, remember where to direct your anger: this insider-first PC government.

NON-PROFIT APPRECIATION WEEK

Mrs. Daisy Wai: As we reflect on the significance of Non-Profit Appreciation Week, I'm honoured to witness the culmination of our collective efforts in celebrating the invaluable contributions of non-profit organizations across Ontario. Under Bill 9, the Non-Profit Sector Appreciation Week Act, we recognized their dedication from February 12 to 16, 2024. Throughout the week, alongside my esteemed colleagues, we had the privilege of presenting certificates of recognition to numerous deserving organizations.

Our local event on February 16, held in the city of Richmond Hill municipal offices, epitomized the spirit of gratitude and admiration. Joined by Minister Michael Parsa and Richmond Hill mayor David West, we honoured 31 non-profit organizations for their unwavering support and transformative impact on our community.

I also hosted a non-profit sector appreciation reception at Queen's Park last night where we extended our heartfelt appreciation to non-profits across Ontario. Let us continue to champion the noble cause of uplifting our non-profit sector, not just during this designated week only, but every week. Together, let's celebrate these unsung heroes enriching our society's fabric.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Recently in my community, two innocent lives were targeted by senseless violence. A 16-year-old youth waiting for the bus to take him to a volleyball game was indiscriminately shot in the face. He suffered critical, life-altering injuries.

Nearby, on the very next day, Mr. Adu Boakye, a 39-year-old man, was shot multiple times and killed. Speaker, he came from Ghana just three months ago to build a better life here and support his family back home. Now he's gone, leaving behind a grieving wife and four children. Two completely innocent lives targeted, and for what? For nothing—absolutely nothing.

These senseless acts destroy lives and families but also rob communities of their feelings of safety. The Ghanaian community held a vigil for them this past weekend, and our faith community and Toronto police led a prayer walk yesterday. They did it to bring community together, to comfort one another, to mourn. They did it to begin restoring feelings of safety and to build hope for the future, and I thank them deeply.

Collectively, we must all do more to stop this senseless violence. We must get these guns off the street and stop

them at our borders. We must continue to strengthen and build the relationship between communities and our police who are here to serve and protect us. We must support victims of crime. And we must invest more to find out and intervene when a person begins to gather that darkness within themselves to cause such terrible harm. We must find them and change the course of their lives before they lose their humanity and take the lives of others.

Speaker, there is hope and there are solutions, and it is our obligation, our moral imperative, to deliver them.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Our government for the people is getting it done for the people of Ontario by keeping costs down, growing the economy and making it easier to build infrastructure for growing communities, like mine in Niagara West.

Last week, our government introduced the Get It Done Act. And our government is getting it done for Niagara.

Right now, work is under way at the new South Niagara Hospital, the largest public infrastructure project in Niagara's history, as well as the new West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Grimsby. These are two critical health care projects for Niagara. Our government said, "Let's get it done."

We're expanding rural broadband in 30 local communities across Niagara West. Fibre optic cable is already in the ground. We said, "Let's get it done."

Our government is investing over \$2 million to connect 7,600 more people in Niagara to primary care. People across the region said, "We need family doctors." This government said, "Let's get it done."

Our government is expanding GO train service to Niagara. Last year, we added more round trips per week. Commuters are looking for more trains. Our government said, "Let's get it done."

Our government is expanding the \$1.2-billion Building Faster Fund to small municipalities, like rural communities in Niagara. When it comes to water, to roads and to bridges, this government is getting it done.

In January, I joined the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade to welcome \$65 million in new investments for Niagara's manufacturing sector in Smithville. We said that we need to become a manufacturing powerhouse. And once again, we're getting it done.

Speaker, from building houses, hospitals, keeping costs down for families and businesses, or just keeping our word, this government is getting it done.

NORMAN JEWISON

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Happy winter, everyone. I am beyond proud to speak today about a Canadian filmmaker extraordinaire, Norman Jewison, a man with strong roots in beautiful Beaches-East York.

On January 20, 2024, we lost Mr. Jewison at the age of 97—a long life worthy of grand celebration and thoughtful acknowledgment. He was known for directing films which

examined social and political issues, all while making controversial or complicated subjects in easy reach to all audiences. He inspired us with standout films like *Moonstruck*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Cincinnati Kid* and *In the Heat of the Night*, just to name a few.

I would like to think that the formative years spent in our beautiful Beaches neighbourhood contributed to his keen sense of curiosity and creativity, with Lake Ontario at his doorstep and the “small town in a big city” feel of Queen Street East. It was the landscape that he drew on to form his respect for human rights, hard work and humour.

He returned to Canada from the United States in 1978, settling in the Caledon area and establishing a farm that would produce prize-winning cattle.

The Canadian Film Centre in Toronto was founded by him and incorporated in 1986.

He is truly one of Ontario’s finest gems.

Look out for a number of local tributes to Norman Jewison, including some of his most beloved films screened at our community’s most beloved, 100-year-old Fox Theatre.

May his life and work be remembered forever.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Laura Smith: This Monday marked the launch of One Fare—fully funded by our government, we’re keeping the costs down for public transit riders in Thornhill and GTA.

Now, riders will only pay once, and they can transfer for free between participating transit, including GO, TTC, YRT, MiWay, Brampton Transit and DRT. So we’re making life more affordable by putting money back into the pockets of transit riders, where it belongs. The One Fare program will save commuters an average of \$1,600 each year.

Thornhill borders on the city of Toronto. Students attending U of T, TMU, York University are stuck with double fees daily, but that stops right now, because our government has made it easier than ever to access transit with this system. Also, with pay your way, riders can pay with Presto or with their credit cards or debit cards—no more rushing to reload the funds.

These programs will boost ridership by eight million per year, which means we’re taking cars off the road, decreasing traffic and pollution. Thanks to the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Transportation, people will benefit from this, especially our students and seniors.

When I announced it at the Promenade mall in Thornhill, it received a huge round of applause. Our government will never stop advocating to make life more affordable and convenient, building a great province to live and work in for generations to come.

1030

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Last month, there was a transformative announcement that was delivered in Windsor

and will phase out thousands of truly dreaded trips up the 401 to London—no offence to my colleagues across the aisle.

Thanks to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, Essex, Kent and Lambton will receive \$4.5 million in annual funding to increase our local pediatric health services. More children of our region will get the care that they need for the future, when they need it, and right at home in our own community.

This funding supports a new after-hours pediatric emergency diversion clinic at Met campus, together with increased support for children’s speech-language pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy rehabilitation services at the John McGivney Children’s Centre in Sandwich and the Connections early years centre in Walkerville. The Children’s Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent and Pathways Health Centre for Children in Sarnia are also receiving new support for their services.

In contrast to the past, this government goes beyond the talk and continues to choose to invest. The regional acute care hospital at County Road 42, the repatriation of nurses working in Detroit, support for in vitro fertilization for the first time, new nursing schools based at the University of Windsor, new MRIs, the cardiac catheterization lab and nuclear accelerator at the Windsor Regional Hospital have been taken off the shelf and delivered, now that the years of inaction are over.

HOUSE SITTINGS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnett): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 9(h), the Clerk has received written notice from the government House leader indicating that a temporary change in the weekly meeting schedule of the House is required, and therefore, the House shall commence at 9 a.m. on Monday, March 4, 2024, for the proceeding of orders of the day.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Tomorrow, March 1, marks Professional Engineers Day. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize and congratulate all professional engineers of Ontario and thank them for their efforts. You are building Ontario for all of us.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m so pleased to welcome today in the gallery the RNAO and their members. It is wonderful to have them here for their advocacy day. I want to particularly welcome Lhamo Dolkar, president-elect of RNAO, Doris Grinspun, executive director, Rachel Elliott, Michelle Heyer, Sonia Chin, Debra Lefebvre, Katie Hurst, Daria Juüdi-Hope, Shelley Evans, John Edwards, Paul-André Gauthier, Lisa Herlehy, Mackenzie Thiessen, Rob Samulack, Ashley Robinson, Ingrid Daley and also joining them, of course, former member of Parliament for Beaches–East York Matthew Kellway. Welcome to your House.

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to introduce members from the RNAO Ottawa region, who specifically asked me to use first names for the sake of brevity, so here we go: Una, Laura, Genevieve, Monique, Jenna, Laura, Ellen, Jennifer and Lisa, and their honorary member Mahoganie. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'd like to thank the member for Ottawa South for introducing me to the House—Lisa was on your list. I'm here.

Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce a great friend to many people in the chamber, including yourself and of course the table, Jeffrey Kroeker, who was a former staff member of ours in many different Parliaments. He's sitting up in the gallery. And I'd like to welcome him back to the chamber and thank him for all his hard work while he worked here.

Mr. Joel Harden: The member for Ottawa South beat me to the punch of the full Ottawa list of RNAO folks so I'm just going to emphasize one guest, and that is Laura Crich. Laura, thank you so much for leading the RNAO in our city. I would be remiss if I didn't also acknowledge and welcome Hoda and Joanna, who have won a nurse practitioner clinic in Ottawa thanks to your hard work, Laura.

Thanks to all the nurses in this building. We need a lot more of them.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I, too, would like to welcome members from RNAO who are here today, especially Doris Grinspun, CEO; president, Claudette Holloway; and those whom I had breakfast with this morning: Carol Maxwell, Margaret Boyle, Kathleen Pikaart and of course incoming president-elect, Lhamo Dolkar. Welcome to Queen's Park and thank you for your good work.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Representing the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario from Windsor-Essex, we have Kathy Moreland, Hali Sitarz, Rose Plantus and Keirsten Smith. Sincere thanks for visiting this morning and welcome to Queen's Park.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would also like to welcome the nurses from RNAO and a special welcome to our Hamilton nurse, Ashley Fry-O'Rourke. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm very pleased to welcome Loris Aro from Don Valley West, a nurse at Bayshore HealthCare who is very committed to treating those with opioid addiction. Thank you, Loris, for being here.

Also, thanks to those I had breakfast with this morning: Jessica, Reza and Chi Chi, who is a nursing student and a refugee from Nigeria. It's a very moving story, so thank you. I encourage her in her studies.

I'm also pleased to welcome Rhea Katyal and Sebastian Cirlan from my riding who are participating in Model Parliament; Yanick Proulx from Sudbury; Nolan Welsh, who is here today as part of Model Parliament but also working in my constituency office and doing a great job; and lastly, Huda Muddei, who is a new staff member on my team. It's her first day in the Legislature, so thank you, Huda.

Hon. Michael D. Ford: Good morning, colleagues. It is my pleasure to welcome to the Legislature this morning Sofia Avdoulos from my riding of York South–Weston. Have a great day at Queen's Park.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am very pleased to welcome my constituent from London West Janet Hunt, who is the president of the RNAO Middlesex-London chapter and has been educating me and advocating with me since I was first elected in 2013.

I also want to welcome Mackenzie Thiessen and Ryan Chan from RNAO Middlesex-London and—for the great conversation we had this morning at breakfast.

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is my great pleasure to welcome our page captain of the day Winifred Lin's parents from Scarborough—Agincourt to this great place: mother Duan Sharon Rong He and father Zhou Jordy Di Lin. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): If there are no objections, I'd like to continue.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I, too, would like to welcome our former MP for Beaches–East York, the marvellous Matthew Kellway. We worked well together on environmental issues. I'm glad you're here.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to welcome immediate past president of RNAO and a constituent of mine, Morgan Hoffarth. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Of course, as an RNAO member myself, I'm so pleased to welcome so many of my friends and colleagues to the House today: Doris Grinspun, Claudette Holloway, Lhamo Dolkar, Poonam Sharma, Paula Manuel. Thank you for your advocacy. Thank you for speaking out for nursing and speaking out for health.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Il y a des membres de l'Association des infirmières et infirmiers de l'Ontario : M. Paul-André Gauthier et Neil Stephen.

I also want to say a great thank you to their president, Dr. Claudette Holloway, and Dot Klein as well as Kayla Guse, who came from Sudbury to be here with us today. Welcome to the RNAO.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to take the opportunity to welcome my friend and a media icon, Egyptian radio host Montaser Montaser, in the gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

1040

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As I look around the room, we see many familiar faces, but I definitely see Kathleen Pikaart. I wanted to welcome her, a registered nurse from my community and on the board of directors for RNAO.

And welcome to any of our neighbours that I can't see from here.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Speaker, thanks for helping me get my squats in today. My Apple Watch has never been happier.

I'm blessed to have many friends in life, and for 40 years, Debra Walker has been one of them, joining us today in the gallery. I'm so thrilled to have her here.

MPP Jill Andrew: Good morning. I would like to welcome Drs. Doris Grinspun and Claudette Holloway to

Queen's Park. Thank you so much for your outstanding leadership.

To all of the RNAO nurses, nurse practitioners, nursing students in the House, thank you very, very much for your hard work.

It was also great to see Sharla from the Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario. I'm going to see you guys again next week.

I'd also like to thank Mason Rosen, Nolan Welsh and Allison Burns, who are students who participated in our Ontario Model Parliament program, for their incredible work. May they have a seat in one of these seats one day.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Speaker, I want to welcome my friend Phiona Durrant, from the Aurora Black Community Association; her son Jayden; and board member Bobbie Marshall. Welcome to Queen's Park. Thank you so much for everything you do in our community, especially the last 28 days. Thank you so much, Phiona.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I, too, would like to give a very warm welcome to staff members and students who are part of the RNAO who are here today.

A special shout-out to members who live or work in Parkdale–High Park: Sharla Adams, Anlan Yao, Alicia Saunders, Susan McNeil.

I also want to say congratulations and a very warm welcome to president-elect Lhamo Dolkar.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I want to welcome, from my riding, Ashrita Samantula, who is participating in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario's Model Parliament. I want to welcome her to Queen's Park.

And I do want to give a shout-out to RNAO. As a board director at Credit Valley Hospital, I spent six years on the front lines, working with them, seeing the great work they do. I had that great privilege, and I want to thank all of you for being here today.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I want to thank the members of CUPE Ontario, OPSEU, OECTA, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association as well as members of the OFL who were all here this morning at the press conference to support gender-affirming health care. Thank you very much.

Ms. Laura Smith: It is my very great honour to welcome Steven Street, the executive director of WoodWorks Ontario. Welcome to your House.

Hon. Stan Cho: On behalf of the Minister of Health—there were a few adjectives missed: dedicated, hard-working, tireless—I would love to welcome the executive director of the RNAO, Doris Grinspun, and her colleagues to the Legislature.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to welcome two students from the Model Parliament program and residents of London North Centre, Danielle Munang and Noah Debicki. It was great meeting you yesterday. I hope you have a great day.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I just want to welcome my riding executive to the House today: my sister Mary Hogarth, Kathleen Gough, Tim Dobson, Gregory Wowchuk, Simon Nyilassy, Gary Stones, Oleg Zakala and

a former employee, Joseph Corazza. They're all here for lunch today. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to introduce Alexander Zan. He's a student from Waterloo region. He's participating in the Model Parliament. Welcome to your House.

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

I want to thank the members for their indulgence and ask that next week we try to be as brief as possible with our introduction of visitors.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Ms. Marit Stiles: This question is for the Premier. Yesterday, while defending his latest plan to stack the judicial appointments committee with insiders and lobbyists, the Premier launched into a tirade about the state of crime in the province. He said, "They're kicking in doors in the middle of the night, putting guns to people's heads...."

Given the Premier's concern about the risk of handguns in violent crime, why did he give a lobbyist for an American handgun manufacturer the power to choose Ontario's next judges?

Interjections.

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

To respond, the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I can understand the confusion that the Leader of the Opposition has in terms of how the system works. But, Mr. Speaker, the committee makes recommendations based on those who apply, and I don't know what else they would have us do, except have people go through and do the interview. Would they prefer the federal system, Mr. Speaker? Would they prefer other systems?

This is a good system. There are good people, smart people, people who are looking for individuals that understand victims' issues, individuals that understand cultural perspectives, individuals that understand community service. They are vetting candidates for consideration. But the choice is the government's to make at the end of the day, and so I look forward to an alternate model from the member of the opposition.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: There's no confusion here. This government changed the law so they could appoint more lobbyists and conservative insiders on the committee and it is not going to solve this problem.

Speaker, the tough-on-crime so-called bluster here in the House is not going to change the fact that it's this government's failures that have left people without access

to justice. Victims of crime are seeing their assailants walk free not because of an insufficiently conservative judge, but because of delays that are the direct result of this Premier's mishandling and underfunding of our court system.

So, back to the Premier, Speaker: How will appointing a handgun lobbyist to the judicial appointments committee help reduce gun crime?

Interjections.

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

The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: So what the NDP would have us do, if they were being open to what they are really saying, is defund the police so there is not an accused to be brought before the court, regardless of which judiciary was there, Mr. Speaker. They have an entirely different world view on how this should work. They don't think that the accused should be held to account. They don't think that they should even interact with the police. They think they should have social workers in place of police across the board.

That just happens to not be our view. We want our communities safe. We want the bad guys to have a sentence that is appropriate for the crime that they make. They didn't even support us on reverse onus on bail, for which our Premier drove across this country, and the federal government eventually passed.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm not going to take lessons about being tough on crime from a government that is under active investigation by the RCMP.

Speaker, not only are these new patronage appointments former Conservative staffers who lobby their former employers for a living, but one of them registered to lobby after they were appointed to the committee that selects judges. Judges are not meant to be like-minded with any political party and they are not meant to be appointed in the interests of private companies seeking to do business with the government. They are meant to serve the people.

So, Speaker, yes or no—back to the Premier—will these insiders continue to lobby for handgun manufacturers while they are appointing our judges?

Interjections.

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

The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, I didn't actually talk about some of this stuff until they got fully on their high horse. In 2017, right before the election, the Liberals appointed 47 judges—47 judges—and I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, it appears, from a very quick look through the public database, that 40% of them were donors to that party and not one was a donor to a Conservative or a Green Party member. So I'll take no lessons from them on the sanctity and how the system should work.

1050

PHARMACARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the federal government has announced they're finally going to start the process of establishing a national pharmacare program here in Canada. This will bring much-needed relief to people who are living with chronic illnesses, to seniors, to all people living with disabilities, and it's something New Democrats at all levels have worked on for many, many years. But much depends on the provincial government to make universal pharmacare a reality, and so far, the Minister of Health has refused to commit to the deal.

So my question is to the Premier: Will you commit to ensuring that all Ontarians have access to essential medication and devices through single-payer coverage?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, the member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I thank the member opposite for the question.

Our government prefers to wait to see what the federal government is going to propose by way of a pharmacare program before we say what our position will be on that. We're looking forward to receiving a clear description of what they are going to be proceeding with.

In the meantime, this government is making it more convenient for people to connect to care closer to home by launching pharmacists prescribing for some of our most common ailments, and that has been so successful. Local pharmacies have become a one-stop shop to get prescriptions for 19 of the most common ailments. This service makes it more convenient for people to access care, eliminating the need to go to doctors or emergency rooms, at no extra cost to Ontarians. Stopping by your local pharmacy is very convenient and, so far, 700,000 Ontarians have been able to do that at pharmacies, 94% of which are participating.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, Ontarians can't afford this government's wait-and-see approach.

It's pretty straightforward. Universal health care must include pharmacare. That was always the intention, since it was first introduced by Tommy Douglas.

We have talked about this many times in this room before—and I will remind everyone, the room is full of nurses here today. I was talking with them this morning about what a game-changer this universal pharmacare program is going to be for their patients. People should not have to choose between medication and food or transportation. Now, thanks to the NDP, Canadians who are struggling with the cost of prescriptions can finally breathe a sigh of relief.

Back to the Premier: Will you commit today to ensure that Ontarians will have access to publicly funded contraceptives and supplies to manage diabetes?

Interjections.

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

Member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you again to the member opposite. In the space of her statement then question there, the Leader of the Opposition said both that it was a universal pharmacare program and that it was just going to cover diabetes and contraceptives. This highlights the issue which—we don't know exactly what it is we're being asked to agree to. When we have all the details and information, we're certainly happy to look at that, and we're certainly looking forward to seeing what the federal government proposes.

Obviously, we want to make sure that our Ontario residents have access to all the services they need here in Ontario, and that's why we're bringing care closer to home in so many ways.

The pharmacists, like I mentioned, are doing prescribing and treating minor ailments, and 700,000 Ontarians have been able to take advantage of that already.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: The truth is, instead of getting to work on expanding prescription coverage and bringing in a universal public health care system, this government is moving to sell off our public health care piece by piece by piece. Big corporations are seizing the opportunity to turn a profit—exactly what we were warning of.

This week, we learned that employees at Shoppers Drug Mart were being pushed to bill for consultations that patients do not need. That company can then bill the province up to \$75 per call. That's double what family doctors can bill for patient visits.

Speaker, I want to know what this Premier is doing to protect patients from this outrageous and unnecessary overbilling.

Interjections.

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

Again, the member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care puts people at its heart by adding and expanding health care services closer to home.

MedsCheck started under the previous government, and just this morning, the member from Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas, in her members' statement, said that it was a great service. It's a one-to-one consultation between pharmacists and eligible patients to help comply with their prescription medications and explore how medications interact with each other.

But what is really important, as I said earlier, is the expanded role for pharmacists that they are now playing in our health care system, which has expanded. Local pharmacies have become one-stop shops for people to be able to get their prescriptions filled for 19 of the most common ailments, such as yeast infections, pink eye, acne and urinary tract infections, and that just requires a health card. The pharmacists have now assessed over 700,000 patients with common ailments. Those patients don't have

to go to primary care doctors and don't have to go to emergency rooms.

This is a great innovation for our health care system. We're going to keep working with pharmacists.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: This government is allowing big corporations to overbill, and it's the people of Ontario who are going to pay the price, obviously.

Speaker, 10,000 people in the Perth area are at risk of losing their family doctors and nurse practitioners, because this government arbitrarily decided not to fund one of their local clinics. There are only 10 doctors, and this government rejected their application for team-based care. Each of those 10 doctors wrote letters to the province asking them to reconsider the application to keep their doors open. If they don't get the funding support, they expect to close within three years.

My question is for the Minister of Health: Are you going to fund the Tay River Health Centre in Perth?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Through our recent historic investment of \$110 million into 78 new and expanded primary care teams, our government is connecting 328,000 more Ontarians to an interprofessional primary care team, including \$4 million in investments to the Kingston Periwinkle model, for example. That will connect over 10,000 people in that region to the primary care they need. The new and expanded teams include family health teams, nurse practitioner-led clinics, community health centres and Indigenous primary care health care organizations, and will add over 400 new primary care providers.

While the Liberals and the NDP cut residency school spots and limited the number of physicians practising in interdisciplinary teams, our government has added over 10,400 physicians since 2018, and our plan has invested nearly a billion dollars annually into interdisciplinary primary care teams.

In addition to these historic investments, we've expanded medical school spots. We're breaking down barriers for—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the government is spending millions and millions of dollars on ads to try to spin that kind of thing, and do you know what? People in Ontario are not buying it. They're not buying it, because they know what's happening in their communities.

Perth is just one of the many communities that is being left behind by this government. Some 10,000 people in Sault Ste. Marie are losing their family doctors in May and another 6,000 patients there are on the brink. I will remind the government that last week, I brought in retirees from Sault Ste. Marie, patients who are going to lose that care. In total, the number of patients who are losing access to primary care in Sault Ste. Marie represents more than a quarter of the population of that city. That is shameful.

Speaker, when will the Premier finally invest in the health care that people need in rural and northern Ontario instead of just serving them up his vanity ads?

Interjections.

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

The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Our government has made this historic investment into interprofessional primary care teams. Our expansion, plus our education programs that I was mentioning, means Ontario is forecasting that 98% of Ontarians will have regular primary care over the next several years, but 90% already have regular primary care. The investment we made triples the \$30 billion we earmarked just a year ago to expand interprofessional primary care teams, and we're funding over four times as many initiatives as outlined in our Your Health plan a year ago.

Ontario is the first province to have a publicly funded a nurse practitioner-led clinic program, which I know the RAO would support. And this is in addition to the new Practice Ready Ontario program that's adding 50 new physicians this year. This government is making the investments that the other parties in this Legislature never made. We're going to make sure primary care is there.

1100

TAXATION

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development. The carbon tax is making everything more expensive for everyone in this province, especially in northern and Indigenous communities.

The cost of transporting goods in northern Ontario is already much higher than in any other part of the province. Individuals in these communities often travel by car and in many cases larger vehicles for safety due to the many back roads and weather conditions, but the federal government is ignoring these concerns.

We know that the people of northern Ontario deserve better. Can the minister please explain more about the negative impact that the federal carbon tax is having on the quality of life for the people in northern Ontario?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the parliamentary assistant and member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Kevin Holland: Thank you to the member from Brantford–Brant for that question. The member from Kiiwetinoong often discusses the price difference in groceries between more populated communities in the north such as Sioux Lookout and the price of groceries in Sandy Lake First Nation. He notes that the price of chicken is often six times higher in Sandy Lake than it is in Sioux Lookout.

A 2022 report from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada concluded that Indigenous groups are disproportionately burdened by carbon pricing. This is before you factor in the harsh impacts of inflation that are

disproportionally felt in remote communities and only being made worse by the carbon tax.

We know that the carbon tax is affecting the price of groceries and the supply chain. We continue to call on the members of the Liberals and NDP to support our government's call to axe the carbon tax once and for all, for all Canadians.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you to the parliamentary assistant for that response. Unlike other parts of the province, the north faces unique barriers regarding fuel costs that need to be understood and respected, but it's clear that neither the federal government nor the NDP or the Liberals care about the dire economic impact the carbon tax has on individuals and families in northern Ontario.

Our government recognizes that this regressive and punitive tax is negatively affecting people in these communities as they are hit hardest at the gas pumps and at the grocery stores. That's why we will continue to support them and call on the federal government to eliminate the costly carbon tax.

Speaker, can the parliamentary assistant elaborate on the detrimental effects that the carbon tax is having on the people, communities and businesses in the north?

Mr. Kevin Holland: The member from Orléans often talks about how if everyone just got a heat pump and used electricity to power their homes, they would be better off.

Is the member from Orléans and the Liberal Party not aware that the dozens of remote and isolated communities rely on diesel fuel and that heat pumps will not work in communities in northern Ontario as temperatures exceed minus 20?

Our government is hard at work to get Indigenous communities off of diesel and onto our clean provincial power grid, but in the meantime, northerners and Indigenous communities are forced to pay more to heat their homes and gas up their vehicles because of the burdensome Trudeau carbon tax.

Members in my riding have routinely called me to say that it's an additional \$450 just in carbon tax to heat their homes. We continue to call on the members opposite to support us in calling on the federal government to axe the carbon tax to make life more affordable for northerners and First Nations people so that we don't need to choose between heating and eating.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is for the Minister of Health. My constituent Kirsten has experienced great challenges accessing take-home cancer drugs. Kirsten was weeks away from losing access to life-saving medication all because Ontario does not automatically cover the cost of take-home cancer drugs. While on medication to help prevent a recurrence of breast cancer, Kirsten lost her job due to downsizing. Along with her income, she lost benefits. She was shocked to learn that Ontario does not

automatically cover take-home cancer drugs. This is a long-standing broken promise of this government. To quote Kirsten: “To know that there’s this treatment that was so important to be on and the stress of not being able to potentially have it is near debilitating.”

Speaker, can the Minister of Health tell Kirsten when will Ontario cover the cost of take-home cancer drugs?

Interjections.

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

The member for Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Cancer is a debilitating disease. A lot of us have personal experiences with it and so I do empathize with the patient. Our government will continue to work to ensure Ontarians have access to the care they need when they need it.

In Ontario, take-home cancer drugs are funded both by the New Drug Funding Program and the Ontario Drug Benefit Program. In 2022, our government spent over \$1.7 billion on cancer drugs, 58% of which went toward take-home cancer drugs.

According to a recent report, while Ontario has the second-highest incidence rate of new cancer cases compared to other provinces and territories, we’re doing a good job on treating them because we have the third-lowest mortality rate for cancer in Canada, and that’s thanks to our great health care providers.

As part of budget 2022-23, an advisory table was struck with a mandate to explore improvements to access for take-home cancer drugs and we’ve already taken action, expanding the use of safe and effective biosimilar drugs while allowing our government to reinvest in new drug therapies to support more people receiving more accessible care.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question? The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec—they all cover take-home cancer drugs, some of them for decades. But in Ontario, good people like Kirsten face administrative and emotional barriers on their already difficult health recovery journey from cancer.

In 2022, your government said it would look at covering take-home cancer drugs. Speaker, today, the Canadian Cancer Society is calling out this government.

Access to take-home cancer drugs saves lives. Ask any member of RNAO here today. Minister, how much longer are we going to have to wait until Ontario covers take-home cancer drugs?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Again, thank you to the member opposite for the question.

As I indicated in my answer, in 2022, for example, our government spent over \$1.7 billion on cancer drugs, 58% of which went toward take-home cancer drugs. So we’re continuing to work with our stakeholders and partners on further discussions and we’ll continue to look at that.

But our government is also making health care more accessible for everybody closer to home, and I know this is welcomed by cancer patients. For example, we funded

49 MRI operations in hospitals in small and rural communities, which is very much appreciated, so people can get a diagnosis easier.

We’re also funding community paramedicine. As I mentioned earlier, we have the pharmacist funding with 700,000 assessments in the pharmacies happening just this year alone. So we’re doing everything we can, in addition to our primary care expansion at \$110 million, to make sure that care is closer to home for everyone.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Patrice Barnes: My question is to the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism. Throughout Black History Month, we celebrate the rich history and many contributions Canada’s Black community has made to our province from the very beginning. As we approach the end of Black History Month, we are reminded that just because February has come to an end, the work doesn’t stop. That is why I’m proud to support this government’s implementation of mandatory Black history in grades 7, 8 and 10, as Black children and youth need to understand that Blacks are not newcomers but are part of the fabric of Canada as a nation since 1600. Yet, Speaker, Black youth in our province continue to face barriers that can impact their future and success.

Speaker, could the minister please tell this House what actions our government is taking to dismantle systemic barriers and empower the next generation of Black leaders with the necessary skills to succeed?

Hon. Michael D. Ford: I want to thank the member from Ajax for the question and, of course, all you do as an ally, advocate and leader for Ontario’s Black communities.

1110

Speaker, I am proud to say that, earlier this month, my ministry announced a further investment of \$16.5 million into the economic stream of the Black Youth Action Plan. While previous Liberal governments stood by with the NDP, it is our government that took real action by increasing the funding of BYAP to over 500% from 2018 to dismantle barriers, improve outcomes and empower Black children, young professionals and families.

That work does not stop when Black History Month does. Our government will continue to take action and make critical investments needed to ensure all Ontarians, no matter their race, religion or background, have all the tools and opportunities they need—

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

The supplementary?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: Thank you to the minister for that response. It is reassuring to hear, unlike the previous Liberal government, our government is beginning to take meaningful action and making critical investments to empower Black youth and young professionals across Ontario.

Speaker, community grassroots organizations play an important role in helping youth find meaningful employment, develop critical skills and unlock a brighter future

for themselves and their communities. Black youth and communities are not looking for special treatment, but, due to historical barriers, need meaningful opportunities to succeed. Our government must remain focused on creating these opportunities where all Ontarians can achieve their dreams and reach their full potential.

Speaker, could the minister please share with this House some of the ways in which investments towards the Black community action plan are creating and driving success for the Black community?

Hon. Michael D. Ford: Again, I would like to thank the member for Ajax for such an important question. Throughout Black History Month I have had the pleasure to meet with many Black Youth Action Plan program participants and see first-hand how BYAP-supported programming is driving positive change in communities across our great province.

Since 2018, Mr. Speaker, our government has supported over 70 Black-led community organizations, which in turn has improved the outcomes of over 60,000 Black children, youth and families. Since launching our economic empowerment stream in 2020, we have helped over 5,000 Black youth and young professionals launch meaningful careers in high-demand sectors like STEM, health care and the skilled trades.

Mr. Speaker, while the Liberals supported by the NDP stood by, our government will continue building a stronger Ontario where all have the tools and opportunities to achieve their dreams and reach their full potential.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. A recent report by the Ontario Health Coalition noted that funding for private clinics in the province has increased by 200% in the last year and, for private hospitals, it has been increased by 300%. Meanwhile, we have operating rooms in public hospitals across Ontario that are not used because public hospitals don't have the funding to recruit and retain staff or pay for the surgeries.

Speaker, why is the Premier choosing to cut public health care and give money to private, for-profit care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Eglinton–Lawrence and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mrs. Robin Martin: You know, it took Ontario years of neglect by previous governments to get into this situation that we're in now, but our government has been taking action and delivering results for Ontarians. Our government is very proud to have one of the largest publicly funded health care systems in the world, a system that we're investing over \$80 billion in this year alone. With our Your Health plan, we're reducing wait times for surgeries and procedures across the province by connecting Ontarians to the care they need when they need it.

Just yesterday, there was an article in the Ottawa Sun, February 28, with a patient, Deb Paterson, who had knee replacement surgery at the Riverside hospital last year. She said she had an excellent experience. Five months

after being told that she would have to wait for a couple of years, she received a call asking if she wanted to have the surgery through this new program. She had surgery four months later, after being assured it was covered by OHIP. She summarized her review of the service with this: "This sure went well for me."

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to say to that member: Those same surgeries can be done in a publicly funded, publicly delivered hospital right here in the province of Ontario, with the very nurses that are here today.

We also know that private clinics are receiving more money per surgery from the government than our public hospitals receive. We know that private surgeries are more expensive than public ones. This government's privatization scheme is making wait times longer, making the staffing crisis worse and costing taxpayers more, not less.

Why doesn't the Premier drop the expensive, unfair, two-tier privatization attempt and instead properly fund publicly funded, publicly delivered health care in the province of Ontario and respect the nurses that are here today?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. I just indicated why we're doing this. The reason we're doing this is to make sure we have more access to surgeries for patients.

I remember another story from the Thunder Bay–Superior North riding, where a man had his surgery done much quicker. What we're doing is seeing that patients are getting back to their lives, to living a fulfilling life much more quickly because they have these surgeries much more quickly. There are countless stories of life-changing impacts across this province: 17,000 people have had cataract surgery already because of the clinics that we opened. They wouldn't have had that surgery had we not opened those clinics.

We're delivering for patients in Ontario so they get the care they need when they need it.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

M^{me} Lucille Collard: This government continues to award contracts without a competitive bidding process, make legislation without a consultation process and has given away \$8.3 billion in greenbelt land to their rich insiders without any evaluation process at all. All these examples are evidence of an extremely flawed decision-making process. What has been the result? Walk-back after walk-back and flip-flop after flip-flop. They have wasted years of precious time that should have been used to help Ontarians.

Now we've just learned that the Attorney General made the decision to appoint a former Conservative staffer and gun lobbyist to be chair of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee. Is appointing a gun lobbyist who will lobby against gun control what the Attorney General and the Premier meant by appointing like-minded candidates?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I welcome the Liberals back into the discussion about how they ran their judicial appointments. Not only were their former chair and their former members multiple-year party donors, I can tell you, when I went back and looked—because I wasn't looking through this lens as I was appointing judges, but I went back and looked. The Liberals join the NDP in their sanctimonious, high-horse rhetoric and, right before an election, they appointed 27 judges, in 2014. Two years before or three years before, it was three people; then, in 2017, 47 more judges, 40% of whom were donors to that party and that party, and not one donor to this party or the Green Party. So I'll take no lessons from them on how the system should work.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question?

M^{me} Lucille Collard: As a lawyer and having worked with the courts, I'm very proud of the independence of our judiciary. I never thought I would have to defend the fundamental principles of our justice system against the attacks of our own Premier and the minister of justice. We know that even the perception of political interference can undermine public confidence in our justice system. So how can the Attorney General proudly say, over and over again, that he is only interested in appointing judges that are like-minded conservatives?

1120

The Attorney General said in this House that he has an obligation to the public to make appointments in the interest of the public. Does the Attorney General believe that it is in the best interest of the public to bring American-style political appointments to our Ontario courts?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the day that Dalton McGuinty stepped down. Do you know what happened that day? He filled two positions, associate chief justice positions—two of them—that very day. And guess what? Those positions weren't open yet. They weren't to be open for over six months in the future, and that night he announced he was stepping down.

I will take no lessons from these people on how the system should work. They abused the system. We are treating it with the respect that it deserves.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Graham McGregor: My question is for the transportation minister. He's a fellow Brampton boy, so it won't take me long to go knock on his door tomorrow if he gives me the runaround today.

Actually, Speaker, getting around Brampton takes a heck of a lot longer than it used to, thanks to 15 years of dithering, delays and neglect from the previous Liberal

government. Now, we have a federal Liberal government that decided that the first provincial highway that they ever wanted to declare a federal impact assessment on just happens to be Brampton's bypass highway, Highway 413.

I wish I was joking about this next part, Speaker, but could you believe that the federal Liberal environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, actually said that Canada should get out of the road-building business altogether? I wish I was joking. Can you believe that—a minister of the crown?

Speaker, could our transportation minister please highlight our government's approach on whether or not the Ontario government should be in the business of building roads and highways?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Now, there's a member that gets it, Mr. Speaker. There's a member that listens to his community, that drives on the roads that those families are driving on every single day trying to get to and from work in the gridlock that has been created because the previous Liberal government refused to invest in roads and bridges and highways.

I'm equally shocked at the comments from the federal environment minister saying that he won't build or invest in more bridges and highways. We're seeing explosive growth in Ontario, a million people over the next two years, and the federal government doesn't want to invest in infrastructure. That's crazy. But thankfully, we've got good members, like the member for Brampton North, fighting for their residents, fighting for the people of this province.

We're going to invest \$28 billion over the next 10 years in building highways and roads, and we will take no lesson from the previous Liberal government that—

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

Mr. Graham McGregor: Thank you to the minister for that response. It's clear that the federal Liberal environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, never drives on Brampton roads, and I'm betting that he never fills up at Brampton gas pumps either.

The federal carbon tax is making life more expensive for everyone in this province. I've heard from many people in my riding of Brampton North that they're finding it difficult to keep up with the rising cost of living. They're paying more for everything, from buying groceries to gassing up their cars to heating their homes. People in our province should not be experiencing financial hardship for the simple acts of buying groceries, taking their kids to school or going to work. We need to stand up for Ontarians all across the board and ensure their concerns are heard loud and clear.

For many residents in Brampton and across our province, heating your home is not a luxury, it's a necessity. Driving is not a luxury; it's a necessity.

Speaker, can the minister highlight what our government is doing to keep costs down for drivers, families and individuals across Ontario?

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right: Driving is not a luxury, it's a

necessity for the people of Ontario. And if the federal transportation minister actually ever came to Ontario and spoke to the people of Peel, Toronto, the GTA—actually drove on these roads—he would know that. But not only do they not want to invest in highways and infrastructure, they want to increase the carbon tax. They want to put more of a burden on families. There are families every single day that are taking their children to soccer practice, to hockey practice, and they've got to fill up the gas tank. Who does the carbon tax punish? It's those families. That's why that member, our government, have been consistent in our fight against the carbon tax: to make sure that we make life more affordable. In fact, we've put forward legislation that will force a provincial referendum if future governments—

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

The next question.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. Over 60,000 children and youth have been waiting for years without assessments, supports or funding for core autism services, funding that is calculated by an annual determination of needs meeting. Done virtually, it's about four hours long and is intense, and if that isn't stressful enough, the funding allocated is far less than it has been in years past with absolutely no explanation and uncontested. An appeal is the only option left. Some take over a year and lapse over the next DON.

Premier, how could you possibly call this a world-class program?

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

Hon. Michael Parsa: I can tell you it's world-class, Mr. Speaker, because this program was developed by the autism community for the autism community, and I thank them for the great work they do and the continuous support they're providing.

The member across and the previous government may have been okay with families languishing on a wait-list where only 8,000 families were being served. It wasn't good enough for us, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't good enough, which is why we've worked with the communities, clinicians, to put in a program that is designed by the community for the community. Thousands of families are now accessing programs and supports that were provided, again, by the community—even the implementation team that supported us in putting this program together was done by the community.

So, once again, taking lessons from the NDP on a failed program by the previous government where they sat on their hands and did nothing is not something I'm going to do.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Lisa is the mother of 10-year-old Jaxon who completed her son's DON in January. Last

year, her funding was \$65,000, and she worked hard to find services and programs and supports based on his needs. At \$85 an hour for some providers and over 25 kilometres away, the funding was stretched to the maximum for the year.

This year, Lisa has been told by AccessOAP that, starting in March, they will be receiving \$8,900—over a \$56,000 cut. Her care coordinator has no explanation and tells her to file a dispute, a process that could take over a year and will absolutely interfere with Jaxon's progress. I call that a black hole, not progress.

Premier, is this acceptable to you?

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

To reply, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

Hon. Michael Parsa: Again, I thank the member for the question. What is not acceptable for Jaxon and the many families across this province is where they were failed by the previous government. You know, Mr. Speaker, and I've repeated this many times, you've been in this Legislature for many years to know what it means to hold the balance of power. The NDP had an opportunity during that time to force the previous government to stand up for families. Did they do that? No, Mr. Speaker.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Hamilton Mountain, come to order.

Hon. Michael Parsa: They didn't listen to families. Some 8,000 families were getting support under the old autism program; it wasn't enough. Today, more than 40,000 families are getting supports and services under the world-class autism services. And we're not there yet. There's still more work to be done. We will not leave anyone behind like the previous government did with the support of the NDP.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Ross Romano: My question is for the Minister of Mines. The previous Liberal government all but ignored the importance of the north, failing to invest in northern Ontario's mineral exploration and development sector. Their inaction had dire effects on the economy of northern Ontario. Even the NDP, after being given the opportunity to build a stronger mining sector and vote in favour of investment and development, chose to say no and do nothing.

Unlike the opposition members, our government understands that exploration and development of critical minerals is essential for the economic prosperity of our province. Can the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to support the mining sector while attracting game-changing critical mineral investments in Ontario?

1130

Hon. George Pirie: Thank you to the member from Sault Ste. Marie for the question. Speaker, I've said many times that we have what the world needs right now to fuel

the EV revolution right here in northern Ontario, especially in Timmins.

Under Premier Ford's leadership, the critical minerals investment strategy was announced, backed by \$45 million in innovation and exploration investments. These investments were not supported by the NDP.

It's clear our efforts are working. I recently joined Canada Nickel's announcement that they are looking at Timmins, to build two new mineral processing facilities here in Timmins. Our \$500,000 Critical Minerals Innovation Fund investment helped Canada Nickel research and develop innovative processing techniques that will be used at these facilities to produce clean nickel and clean steel.

Thanks to our government's sound strategy and investments, we are securing major investments from battery plants in the south to processing plants in the north—

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

Mr. Ross Romano: I want to thank the minister for his answer. This is amazing news, not just for Timmins and northern Ontario, but for all of Ontario.

These facilities will ensure that the minerals from Timmins are getting processed in Timmins, boosting local employment opportunities and creating sources of nickel for the North American electric vehicle supply chain.

Speaker, the opposition has made it clear, based on their voting record, that they do not believe in the potential of the mining industry in northern Ontario. They would rather rely on minerals from overseas to fuel the electric vehicle revolution.

On this side of the House, we believe it is our obligation to ensure critical minerals are developed and processed right here in our wonderful province of Ontario.

Will the minister please tell us more about how these processing facilities are going to help us build a made-in-Ontario supply chain for electric vehicles?

Hon. George Pirie: Thank you again to the member from Sault Ste. Marie for the question.

Speaker, these facilities will bring more jobs, increase Ontario's processing capacity, and make Timmins a pillar of the supply chain we are building to fuel the EV revolution. One facility is going to be the largest nickel processing centre in North America, while the other will be the largest stainless steel and alloy production facility in all of Canada.

When asked why he chose Timmins, CEO Mark Selby said, "You'd be very hard-pressed to find anywhere else in the world that has the unique combination of advantages we can find right here in Timmins." I couldn't agree more. But these projects aren't just about a better future for Timmins. They'll create a better future for everybody in Ontario, especially Indigenous communities. Canada Nickel has been working with First Nations from the start, and Chief Bruce Archibald of TTN proudly voiced his continued support for these superb projects.

We have the opportunity of a lifetime in our province, and thanks to Canada Nickel, we are turning opportunities

into realities, proving again that there's no better place to invest and to do business than right here in Ontario.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. Chris Glover: My question is to the Attorney General. In 2022, we found out that the Attorney General was personally interviewing candidates to be Ontario's next Chief Justice. Now the government is openly admitting that they are seeking conservative candidates.

So in interviewing Chief Justice candidates, what questions did the Attorney General ask? Did he ask the candidates who they vote for? Did he ask how the candidates would rule in certain cases? Did he give the candidates instructions on the political agenda that they'd be expected to carry out? And does the Attorney General think it's appropriate for a government under criminal investigation by the RCMP to be so involved in the selection of judges?

Hon. Doug Downey: There were four candidates who applied to become the Chief Justice, and as I'm charged with making that decision—the establishment thought that maybe they should make the decision for me and give me a recommendation. I thought that wasn't really the appropriate way to go forward. I sat down with each candidate for an hour. Politics never came up. It's not appropriate. The opposition may not understand. Judges don't take direction and it would be foolish to try. It would be crossing a line.

What I was interested in in those interviews was their understanding of the court system across the province because it's very unique. We can talk about the northwest and the northeast and how Ottawa is different than Windsor. Look, Mr. Speaker, it's a very complex system. I wanted to hear their plans to help keep the courts moving properly.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: The Attorney General just said that the Liberals were crossing the line, and he also accused the Liberals of abusing the system by appointing liberal judges, but this government is appointing conservative judges. Are you not also abusing the system? Judges are required to make impartial decisions based on the evidence and the law.

In interviewing candidates and assessing their conservative credentials, is the minister asking judicial candidates to override their constitutional responsibility to provide people with a fair and impartial hearing, or is he asking them to make judicial decisions based on political bias?

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, the naïveté is staggering about how this system works. I do not give any direction to any judge at any time. That is ridiculous. We are charged with running the administration of the system and I want people who understand how the system works, have ideas and will work with their colleagues to do exactly that.

I would challenge the member opposite to go through the 89 judges that I have appointed so far and tell me that

it is not a balanced list. I have appointed excellent judges. They are the cream of the crop right across the board, and I couldn't tell you who donated or voted Conservative. I really could not tell you.

FOREST FIREFIGHTING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. With the forest fire season around the corner, we can't help but reflect on last year's fire season. In 2023, Ontario and Canada experienced one of the most challenging fire seasons in recent memory. That's why our government must not lose our focus on the importance of keeping Ontarians and our natural resources safe. It is essential that we do all we can to protect communities across the province in supporting the brave men and women who are on the front lines responding to wildland fires.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what actions our government has taken to strengthen Ontario's fire ranger workforce?

Hon. Graydon Smith: Thank you to the member for the question. I'm always thrilled to be able to talk about our great fire rangers here in Ontario and how we are supporting them.

We're going to play a little game called, "Did you know?" Did you know that the previous government's base funding for fire fighting was \$69.8 million and we raised that to \$134.9 million? Did you know that, last fall, we invested an additional \$20.5 million to support our fire rangers, support new aerial suppression technologies, support science and innovation, including entering into collaborative research agreements with universities and building capacity to work with Indigenous communities in wildland fire management? Did you know that? Because that's what this government is doing to support our fire rangers every fire season since we've taken over.

Mr. Speaker, we have their backs. We have the backs of the communities in northern Ontario, the individuals, the infrastructure that Ontario needs to continue to grow, and we're going to keep everybody safe.

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you to the minister for his response. It's great to see our government standing behind our fire rangers in ensuring continued preparedness and resiliency when facing forest fires. However, Speaker, the number of active wildland fires has increased in Ontario over the last decade. These fires have devastating impacts on our communities, putting people, property and livestock in danger. It is our fire rangers who put their lives on the line to protect natural resources and public safety. We must continue to ensure our fire ranger crew is properly equipped, compensated and attract as many people as possible to join the field.

Speaker, can the minister please explain what actions our government is taking to improve fire ranger recruitment and retention?

Hon. Graydon Smith: I'll say one thing right now: We have the very, very best fire rangers right here in Ontario. In fact, they are internationally recognized and help out both domestically and internationally when there are challenges not only in this jurisdiction, but in other jurisdictions. And we're helping to recruit more. In fact, recruitment is open right now for the upcoming fire season.

1140

What are we doing to help more people come into the fire ranger network? We're reimbursing them for tuition costs to help remove that barrier and providing more equipment bonuses for them to make sure that what they need is covered. We're providing, for the first time, standby pay and on-call pay.

This is a tough job, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that. We celebrate the men and women who answer the call and do this on behalf of Ontarians. We will always have their back. We are always looking for new ways to support them, and we've got more good announcements coming up to support our fire rangers right here in Ontario.

JUSTICE SYSTEM

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is to the Premier. The newly appointed chair of the judicial appointments committee is a registered lobbyist for an American gun manufacturer. The Premier then claimed that he wanted to quadruple down on violent offenders, but it's actually on his watch over the last six years that we've seen offenders going free because the criminal justice system is literally collapsing under this government's neglect.

Chronic underfunding has led to critical understaffing, which has led to the critical courtrooms being closed, which also means that serious cases are being thrown out because they have missed their basic administrative delays.

Will the Premier explain to victims of crime in Ontario why his focus is naming gun lobbyists to the judicial appointments committee as opposed to being laser-focused on funding and fixing the broken court system?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: In budget after budget, we've made investments in the judicial system in terms of the administration. We finished the courthouse with 73 more courtrooms, 63 plus 10 meeting rooms. We have done a ton of work to modernize this system, more work than has been done in decades.

The member opposite and her party, and the Liberal Party, voted against every single step forward and keep talking about defunding police and yanking supports out of the system, redirecting those supports.

I can tell you, let's just talk about any part of the system and the investments that we're making; they are historic. We have moved the system forward decades in a matter of years, Mr. Speaker.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Back to the Premier: He needs to be honest, and the government needs to be honest. Ontario now has the worst track record for court hearings across the country. The wait time is now five years long. How can the Premier be tough on crime when he isn't even smart on crime?

Under this government, court delays have exploded, forcing judges to release violent and gun-related offenders because they have not had their trials completed in a constitutionally allowable time frame. What I think Ontarians want to understand is, how can we have a Premier that has no respect for the charter rights of Ontarians?

Speaker, will the Premier own up to his track record and let Ontarians know how many sexual assault charges, how many impaired driving charges and how many gun-related charges have been thrown out because of the dysfunctional court system, because they can't get their trials done in time, because they refuse to fund the courts properly and they refuse to fix the system?

Interjections.

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

Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm not entirely sure what the question was in there, so I'm going to talk about the investments we have made in the court system.

Mr. Speaker, we have revolutionized the way that the courts work. We are seen across the country as leaders. A former federal Attorney General said to me, "You know, with the COVID money that you got, you were the only province that was deploying it the way it was meant to be done." I am very proud of that fact.

We are doing things that couldn't be done for decades, that wouldn't be done for decades, because the Liberals weren't paying attention and the NDP were focused on the social worker side of everything. We're focused on the offenders. We're focused on the victims. We're focused on making sure the administration runs exactly the way Ontarians expect it to, and we're going to keep that up.

TAXATION

Mr. Ric Bresee: My question is for the Minister of Finance. When I'm out speaking with my residents across Hastings–Lennox and Addington, one thing keeps on becoming very, very clear: I hear constantly about affordability, specifically how unaffordable it is to fill up their gas tank, to heat their homes, to light their stoves. The federal carbon tax is raising the price of everything. Families in my riding and across Ontario can't afford higher taxes that the opposition Liberals and NDP seem to want to impose, and the members opposite are failing to recognize that the rising cost of consumer goods is quickly becoming unsustainable.

So, Speaker, can the minister please tell this House how we are fighting for the people of Ontario to make their lives more affordable?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the terrific member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Crushingly high interest rates are hurting families right across the province. We've called on the Bank of Canada to do the right thing and stop raising interest rates—in fact, start lowering those interest rates. When the price of gas is making life harder and less affordable for the millions of Ontario drivers, we stepped in and we cut the gas tax, providing savings right across the province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we all know that the carbon tax unnecessarily is driving up inflation and harming the pocketbooks of Ontarians. We continue to call on the federal Liberals to do the right thing, listen to the people and end the carbon tax.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader under standing order 59.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank colleagues for a scintillating week here at the Legislature this week and for all of your hard work.

Next week, on Monday, March 4, in the morning, as the Speaker announced, we will be coming back at 9 a.m. We will begin with the third reading of Bill 157, Enhancing Access to Justice Act. In the afternoon, there will be opposition day motion number 1 and then we will continue on with third reading of Bill 157.

On Tuesday, March 5, in the morning, there will be third reading of Bill 157 and then that will continue in the afternoon. For private members' business that day, it will be motion number 77 from the member for Mississauga Centre, which is on lung cancer screening expansion.

On Wednesday, March 6, in the morning: Bill 166, Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024. In the afternoon, there will be a debate on concurrence in supply. At 6 p.m., there will be private members' business, Bill 158 standing in the name of the member for Cambridge, which is the Group of Seven Day Act.

On Thursday, March 7, in the morning: Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act. In the afternoon, there will be a ministerial statement on International Women's Day. In the afternoon, we will return to Bill 166. Private members' business that day, standing in the member for Mississauga–Lakeshore, is motion number 81, halting the alcohol escalator tax.

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member for Scarborough–Guildwood has a point of order.

MPP Andrea Hazell: I seek unanimous consent that, notwithstanding standing order 40(e), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group to respond to the ministerial statement today on Black History Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Ms. Hazell is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 40(e), five minutes be allotted to

the independent members as a group to respond to the ministerial statement today on Black History Month. Agreed? Agreed.

I understand the member for Ottawa–Vanier has a point of order.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: I seek unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(4), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group during private members' public business today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Madame Collard is seeking the unanimous consent of the House that, notwithstanding standing order 100(a)(4), five minutes be allotted to the independent members as a group during private members' public business today. Agreed? I heard a no.

There being no further business this morning, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1149 to 1300.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, I have a message from the Honourable Edith Dumont, Lieutenant Governor, signed by her own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March, 2024, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

Signed by the Lieutenant Governor.

Members may take their seats.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael D. Ford: Good afternoon, colleagues. It is my pleasure and honour to welcome to the Legislature this afternoon Black student and community leaders from across the province and representatives from: Delta Family Resource Centre; Early Childhood Development Initiative; Youth Now on Track; Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education; Smile for Sache; Kingdom House Christian Centre; and, lastly, the chair of the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity, Mohamed Firin. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's an absolute pleasure to introduce Navi and Ana from Sai Dham Food Bank who are here to discuss looking for a sustainable revenue model to support our youth and give back to the community. Welcome to Queen's Park.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on attended

appointments dated February 29, 2024, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

1082472 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2024

Mr. Byers moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr39, An Act to revive 1082472 Ontario Limited.

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

First reading agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I am pleased to be sharing my time today reflecting on Black History Month with my colleague the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Speaker, Black history is Ontario's history. The journey of Black Ontarians throughout our history is interwoven into the very fabric of our province and was critical to several milestones achieved by Ontario.

Ontario was a founding province of Canada back on July 1, 1867, but in 1812, more than half a century earlier, Black Canadians took up arms in defence of this land, fought, bled and died in order to preserve and safeguard the future of a country to come.

Richard Pierpoint, a former slave who escaped the cruelty and inhumanity of slavery in the American South, settled here in Ontario and fought for this colony against American expansionism. He and other Black Loyalists who joined this cause understood like no other that their fight was about more than simply winning a war; it was about maintaining their freedom. Because to lose in 1812 would have meant that this land of liberty would have become the territory of a slaveholding country. To lose in 1812 would have meant no Canada 150, no mosaic of multiculturalism and no "True North strong and free." Their stories make up Ontario's rich history, and how they have changed the face of our nation, from Confederation right up until this very moment.

My point is that Canadians of African descent have been living for, fighting for and dying for Canada before there was even a Canada to speak of. This is a history that we too often don't know about and it is a crucial part of why, under the joint leadership of both the minister and parliamentary secretary of education, Black history will now be a core part of the curriculum for Ontario's students

in grades 7, 8 and 10. This knowledge will inspire and empower students to learn about these contributions, to reflect on reconciliation and the road ahead as we continue working together to build a province that welcomes everyone.

As a Black woman, an MPP and a member of cabinet, I feel that I am a voice for the community in my constituency here in the Legislature and across the province. I'm honoured to be a Black woman in a leadership role with a voice at the table, and I am so grateful to this Premier for choosing me to be a part of his cabinet, to serve as the first Black person, man or woman, in a PC government cabinet in Ontario's history. I made history and our Premier was a vehicle to make that history happen.

I'm proud to be one of the many Ontarians who are working to make our province the best that it can be. Black History Month is about honouring the legacy and the important contributions of Black people who help make Ontario a more inclusive and diverse province.

This very Legislature has made its share of Black history. In 1963, Ontarians elected MPP Leonard Braithwaite as Canada's first Black parliamentarian at either the federal or provincial level. Then of course there is the glorious trail-blazing path of the Honourable Lincoln Alexander. Not only was he Canada's first Black MP, he was also the first Black person to serve in a vice-regal position in Canada, as Ontario's Lieutenant Governor.

Speaker, the government of Canada's theme for Black History Month this year is "Black Excellence: A Heritage to Celebrate; a Future to Build." That theme is why I believe Black History Month is an ideal opportunity to look ahead and find ways to work together to strengthen Ontario's proud and historic Black community. Acknowledging that there is still a lot of work to be done in this province to overcome anti-Black racism and determination, it is an important step to achieving equity for all Ontarians.

As we work together to bring more women into the forefront of our economy, I see first-hand the barriers that many women face in empowering themselves economically. Research shows that Black, Indigenous and other racialized women are more likely to be majority owners of small businesses than other women. They exemplify the Ontario spirit, taking a chance to build a better future for themselves, their families and Ontarians at large. However, these women face even greater barriers when starting and scaling up their businesses. That's why Ontario has been leading a range of initiatives and commitments to empower women to be successful and to help build a strong Ontario together.

1310

One program I'm particularly proud of is the Women's Economic Security Program. This program provides training for low-income women to equip them with the skills, the knowledge and experience to get a job or start a business and increase their financial independence. Participants can also access wraparound supports such as child care, transportation, food and referrals to other services.

Our government, with the help of our community partners, is tearing down the barriers that have stood between women and building their dreams. I'd like to thank organizations like Roots Community Services that put a particular focus on black women in entrepreneurship, making sure they have the supports that they need for success.

Speaker, I invite this House and all Ontarians to take a look at the phenomenal number of black women entrepreneurs and business leaders who are making their mark in every field. Even as we work to remove the barriers and empower more women, Black History Month provides us an opportunity to reflect on the injustices and the inequities the community has faced throughout history, some of which continue to this day.

That brings me back to the late Lincoln Alexander. Last month, I saw the unveiling of the bust commemorating this larger-than-life trailblazer, whose father worked as a railroad car porter and whose mother worked as a maid. The Honourable Lincoln Alexander's bust will be on permanent display in this Legislature's west wing, where it will be viewed by thousands annually, in particular the schoolchildren who will walk through the halls and see someone who reflects them and their community and be inspired.

That's the same way I feel now when I come into this Legislature and I see students sitting around. Representation is so important. Now, when students look down in this room, they see representation in every part of this House, in every government. That is so important. They will see themselves and the indelible contributions. They will see him, the Honourable Lincoln Alexander, and the contributions he made to Ontario's history.

As I told the House last year and to every young Black person watching today, if you can see me, you can be me. You are strong. Your voice is important. You are powerful beyond measure. When it comes to celebrating Black History Month, and when it comes to realizing Black potential, visibility is not just a possibility; it's a necessity.

I want to thank you all. Happy Black History Month. Let's keep moving forward and building on the progress that we've made.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Michael D. Ford: It is always an honour to rise side by side and follow Ontario's Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity, as she is an incredible trailblazer and champion for, of course, women and children and girls right across the province but also Ontario's Black community. It's always a pleasure.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister said, every February, Ontarians commemorate Black History Month. This time provides an opportunity to reflect on the rich culture and history of Ontario's Black communities and the critical role they have and continue to play in shaping our province to everything it is today.

This year's theme of Black History Month is "Black Excellence: A Heritage to Celebrate; a Future to Build." This theme calls on us to remember the contributions,

expertise and dedication shown by generations of Black leaders who came before, and how their efforts have helped break down barriers and strengthen communities. We celebrate those who blazed the trail and remain focused on empowering the next generation of leaders who are continuing the legacy by taking up the mantle and are actively driving positive change in communities right across our province, from Windsor in the west to Ottawa in the east, to the southern tips of Lake Ontario, up to the far north.

In this House, we have exceptional Black leaders on both sides of the aisle. I would specifically like to acknowledge my colleagues the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity as well as the members from Ajax and Scarborough Centre, whom I have the privilege to serve with each and every day. Each of these members continues to work tirelessly as advocates for their communities and as champions for Ontario's Black communities here at Queen's Park. They have shown to young people from across the province that they, too, can aspire to greatness and one day may take their rightful seat in this chamber as well.

Throughout Black History Month, I have had the pleasure of getting out into communities to meet with local Black leaders and Black-led community organizations, and I have had the opportunity to see first-hand the important work they do to support and empower their fellow community members.

In Ottawa, we met with staff, student leaders and athletes from St. Pius X school; in particular, students Sam and Binae. It was inspiring to see how they were using their platform as student athletes to increase representation of Black youth in athletics and the arts.

In Durham, we joined the MPP for Ajax and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education in meeting with Durham Region Association of Black Professionals and Entrepreneurs. This business collective helps Black-owned businesses in Durham gain access to the resources needed to take their businesses to the next level through networking and connection building. In addition, the association also provides Black youth with guidance and mentorship programming to pursue post-secondary education, as well as guidance for those participants pursuing careers in STEM and entrepreneurship.

In Etobicoke, we met with the Delta Family Resource Centre to tour their business incubator hub and learn about how the centre is actively working to connect Black youth with critical skills training in IT and entrepreneurship, to provide work-relevant education and help young people establish a network of business leaders to help launch their careers.

These are just a select few examples of outstanding leaders I have had the privilege of meeting with during Black History Month. They, along with the thousands like them from across Ontario, are the unsung heroes of our province and represent the very best of the Ontario spirit. They have given back to their communities in immeasurable ways. And through their ongoing commitment

and dedication, they continue to live up to the words of the Honourable Lincoln Alexander, who said, "It is your duty to set a higher example for others to follow."

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the vital role these organizations and those like it play in empowering Ontario's Black communities, and we remain a proud ally and partner in supporting the vital work they do.

Earlier this month, my ministry announced an additional investment of \$16.5 million into the Economic Empowerment Stream of the Black youth action plan. This will provide organizations with a proven track record of empowering Black children and families with the resources they need to increase capacity and scale up their organizations to support and empower even more Black youth and young professionals right across our great province. This investment builds on the over \$138 million invested into the Black youth action plan since 2018. I am proud to say that over 60,000 Black youth, young professionals and families have benefited from the BYAP-funded programming during that time, including more than 5,000 youth and young professionals helped through the economic empowerment stream specifically since the launch in 2020.

1320

Yet, despite our best efforts, we know that even today, there remain barriers that continue to hold Black Ontarians back, preventing them from reaching their full potential. During Black History Month, we celebrate the undeniable progress that we have made while simultaneously recognizing that there is still more work to do.

We know the important role education plays in raising awareness and dismantling barriers. That is why, under the leadership of the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education, alongside the minister, I was proud to join my colleagues for a truly, truly special day. That day was earlier this month, when our government announced Ontario would be mandating education for grade 7, 8 and 10 students on the history and contributions of Black leaders and change-makers who shaped our province and country, ensuring the next generation is equipped with the knowledge and understanding of the injustices of the past and how they too can be allies for the community.

As we close the chapter on Black History Month, our government remains as steadfast as ever in our commitment to being a partner and advocate for Ontario's Black communities. This work does not end when February does. We will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with the community to build bridges, dismantle barriers and make the investments needed so that all can chase their dreams and reach their full potential.

The diversity of our communities is precisely what makes Ontario such a vibrant place to live, work and raise a family. We as Ontarians take great pride in this diversity and all the ways in which it strengthens the fabric of our province. When we all work together to support and uplift each other, our potential is truly limitless.

Let us all continue to be inspired by the trailblazers who came before us. And let us continue to empower those who are currently driving positive change in communities

across the province of Ontario. Together, we can ensure a better and brighter future and build a stronger Ontario for all who choose to call Ontario home.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I want to start by wishing everyone and all the members in this House and all Ontarians a very happy Black History Month. Today, I have been given this distinct honour of delivering the remarks. I want to be able to speak about Black excellence and the incredible Black communities and the Black leaders who call Ontario their home.

I want to start by recognizing the incredible work done to pave the way for today's Black leaders, leaders in this House who have stood before us, such as Zanana Akande, Alvin Curling, Lincoln Alexander, Rosemary Brown and so many more. I want to recognize the former president of the Ontario Black History Society, Rosemary Sadlier, as well as the leadership around her, who lobbied the many levels of government to get Black History Month finally recognized by government and institutions right across Canada. And who can forget—who can forget—the Honourable Dr. Jean Augustine, the very first Black woman to serve as a federal minister of the crown and member of Parliament in Canada?

In my riding of Toronto Centre, we have an incredible number of communities, including those who live and identify as Black residents and Black people. They truly represent the very best. They live in neighbourhoods such as Regent Park and Moss Park and they are thriving; they have a very diverse Black population. Black residents are at the forefront of organizing for community benefits for their neighbourhoods as they undergo tremendous revitalization.

They are also leaders for incredible grassroots organizations such as Youth Gravity, which empowers young people to become leaders; Shoot for Peace, who promote non-violence and unity through photography and the arts; and Mothers of Peace, a very important peer-led organization which is very close to my heart. They are a grassroots group of mothers in the neighbourhood who came together after a horrific summer of gun violence in our community, which affected so many families. They carry out school supply drives; they create education opportunities, work with community partners, support social enterprises and organize respite opportunities for their members. Their work is a model for positive community building and I am in absolute awe of them.

I also want to give a shout-out to the neighbourhood of Little Jamaica in my colleague's riding of Toronto—St. Paul's. Little Jamaica is a thriving and culturally rich neighbourhood full of small, family-run businesses serving uniquely Jamaican products to the community. But the community of Little Jamaica has been struggling for years. The core of the business district is along Eglinton Avenue, so it's safe to say that you probably will know what I'm about to say.

The businesses of Little Jamaica have been hidden behind construction hoarding board for 13 years as the

Eglinton LRT is being built and then rebuilt and then repaired. Their businesses have suffered tremendously and some of them have closed under this uncertainty. They've received, unfortunately, not enough government support, and definitely not enough respect from Metrolinx. This government needs to do so much more to support the community through the strains of these closures, as well as the flooding and pandemic impacts that this community has faced. But through all of it, the community is resilient. I am so encouraged, and I want to encourage all of you: Every single one of us should be visiting and supporting Little Jamaica and we should all go out to all our respective communities right across our ridings to support Black-owned businesses.

There is so much critical work being done by Black folks in communities to uplift marginalized voices. My friend leZlie lee kam and other Black and queer seniors are working so hard, Speaker, to address the issues of homophobia and transphobia in long-term-care spaces, which is vital to make sure that queer and trans elders don't have to go back into the closet as they enter the long-term-care phase of their life.

As we talk about Black history, we also need to talk about today's Black realities and Black futures. I want to give a shout-out to Black CAP; African and Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario; Friends of Ruby; Supporting Our Youth; Pride Toronto, especially their Sankofa fest celebrating Black artists and performers. I want to thank them for all the work that they do in Toronto Centre day in and day out.

We cannot celebrate Black history in Ontario without recognizing today's Black realities, that Black students are being left behind also in overcrowded and underfunded schools; when Black girls and women, including Black trans women, are most susceptible to gender-based violence and misogynoir; when Black men and boys are overrepresented in foster care, youth detention centres and jails; when Black maternal health is overlooked and intentionally deprioritized.

Next week, Speaker, is Black Mental Health Week. I want to take this opportunity to thank—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Unfortunately, we are out of time for a response.

Further responses?

MPP Andrea Hazell: Madam Speaker, it gives me great honour to stand before you and the members to speak about Black History Month. Black History Month is celebrated during February across Canada to acknowledge and understand the contributions and achievements that Black people have accomplished, despite the historical roots of racism, oppression and slavery. This month is an opportunity to celebrate and honour the past and present contributions of Black people in Canada—amazing—while embracing new opportunities for the future.

1330

The roots of Black people in Canada date all the way back to the 1600s. In 1800, over 30,000 Black people came to Canada through the Underground Railroad, as a way to escape the slavery and racism experienced in America.

For centuries, Black people have been enslaved and oppressed in Canada, which came to an end on August 1, 1834. Since the 1800s, Black Canadians have had a positive impact on the Canadian life. From the stage to the halls of Parliament, from the union halls to Bay Street, Canada has always benefited from its Black inhabitants beyond the role of inexpensive manual labour. Those achievements are often dismissed, not recognized, erased from texts or left undocumented, creating a vacuum, which is often filled with negative, fictional tales.

In 1995, the House of Commons officially recognized February as Black History Month, and we all know who is responsible for that. It's the trailblazer Jean Augustine. We have since then recognized Black people for their accomplishments. There are many citizens who have notable accomplishments, such as the Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander—we've heard that from Associate Minister Charmaine Williams, in her speech—who was the first member of a racialized community to serve as the Queen's representative in Canada; and the Honourable Dr. Jean Augustine, who is a trail-blazing politician and is the first African Canadian woman to be elected in the House of Commons.

These notable figures have paved the pathway and opened many doors of opportunities for the advancement of Black people in this country.

Black history is important to Canada, because Black communities have been a long part of shaping Canada's heritage and identity. I want to end by saying—because I didn't have a lot of time—I would like to recognize the Black MPPs in this House: MPP Jill Andrew, MPP Patrice Barnes, MPP Sarah Jama, MPP David Smith and MPP Charmaine Williams. We are all trailblazers. We are the leaders now. I'm very proud of you all, and congratulations.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further response? I recognize the member for Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I'm honoured today to recognize Black History Month, a month where we honour the heritage, courage and contributions of Black Canadians.

As a person who identifies as white, I regularly reflect on the systems of privilege and the systems of oppression that exist in our society. I think by constantly reflecting on systems of privilege and oppression, we can ensure that Black history is not just a month, but every month. Then, we can dismantle systemic anti-Black racism in our society.

As a school social worker, I've worked alongside many families. So I want to take this moment to ensure that we wish love and kindness for all young Black people in our school system so that they can be safe, they can be healthy, they can be loved, and they can love themselves as they are. Let's ensure that everybody in this chamber continues to tap people on the shoulders. Too often, I've been in spaces that are very white, and people need to be tapped on the shoulder so that they continue to climb the ladder to these leadership positions today.

I'm grateful for all of you who are tapped on the shoulder and continue to tap people on the shoulder. This is how we can combat anti-Black racism and hate that

persists in our community and online. Don't forget about our online spaces. Let's create regulations to make sure that those are healthy spaces for Black people too. It's only getting worse. So we need to do these things so we can build an equitable, accessible, safe—safe—and caring Ontario for all.

I'm grateful to talk about the organizations in my community that fight everyday to have racial equity and to celebrate Blackness: AFRO, Kind Minds, ACCKWA, the Waterloo Region Community Foundation, Caribbean Canadian Association of Waterloo Region, just to name a few. The work they do is so vital and appreciated.

I also want to recognize my mentors who remind me all the time how to be a better ally: regional councillor Colleen James, city councillor—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Sorry, but that's the time for responses.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I move that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committees:

On the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, Mr. Oosterhoff replaces Mr. Kanapathi; and

On the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Ms. MacLeod replaces Mr. Byers, Ms. Vaugeois is removed, and Mr. Ke is added; and

On the Standing on Finance and Economic Affairs, Ms. Pierre replaces Mr. Dowie; and

On the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, Mrs. Stevens is removed and Mr. Mantha is added; and

On the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Mr. Clark replaces Mr. Riddell, Ms. Kusendova-Bashta replaces Ms. Barnes, and Ms. Gallagher Murphy replaces Ms. Pierre; and

On the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy, Mr. Kanapathi replaces Ms. Kusendova-Bashta, and Ms. Clancy is added; and

On the Standing Committee on the Interior, Mr. Riddell replaces Ms. Gallagher Murphy; and

On the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, Mrs. Gretzky is removed and Ms. Jama is added.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Ms. Khanjin has moved that the following changes be made to the membership of the following committees:

On the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, Mr. Oosterhoff replaces Mr. Kanapathi; and

On the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Ms. MacLeod replaces Mr. Byers, Ms. Vaugeois is removed, and Mr. Ke is added; and

On the Standing on Finance and Economic Affairs, Ms. Pierre replaces Mr. Dowie; and

On the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, Mrs. Stevens is removed and Mr. Mantha is added; and

On the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Mr. Clark replaces Mr. Riddell, Ms. Kusendova-Bashta replaces Ms. Barnes, and Ms. Gallagher Murphy replaces Ms. Pierre; and

On the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy, Mr. Kanapathi replaces Ms. Kusendova-Bashta, and Ms. Clancy is added; and

On the Standing Committee on the Interior, Mr. Riddell replaces Ms. Gallagher Murphy; and

On the Standing Committee on Government Agencies, Mrs. Gretzky is removed and Ms. Jama is added.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Mr. John Vanthof: I have the ability to respond.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize. My mistake. Response?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. I just would like to put a few remarks on the record regarding this committee change. I'd also like to make it well known that the government House leader did approach me this morning and say that there were going to be changes.

I believe that everyone should have input in committees. We believe that. We're not here to debate that. The committee process is very important. But since the standing orders have been changed—that the government House leader decides whoever is on committee—for everyone else, it has changed the dynamics of how this place works and how the committee system works.

I fully expect the government House leader and the government to pick their own cabinet, to pick who they think is best, to pick their own committee members.

I do question whether the government has the best observation or the best view of who would be the best committee members for the opposition to be on committee. This isn't something that is going to change how government functions. Truth be told, we can sub in other people. But the simple idea that one team picks the players for the other team and picks the lines for the other team is absolutely, utterly ridiculous.

What makes this almost laughable is, the way the committee structure is set up—and again, we're not arguing this. The committee structure is set up in the same proportion as the elected members, so that a majority government has the majority on the committee. So they control the votes, regardless. So why they have to play around with the opposing members is beyond me. It is really beyond me, other than for a term that would not be appropriate in this House.

1340

It's merely tinkering. Again, we are not talking about how many members of the opposition are on the committee or how many members of the independents are. We don't want to stifle anyone's voice. But just the idea that the government House leader wakes up one morning and says, "Do you know what? We are going to take one NDP member off and maybe put another NDP member there"—and not the member, but the actual person. So all the scheduling—just from a mechanical point of view, the scheduling gets messed up.

Perhaps we have a person on the committee that has an affinity, who really wants to be on that committee, who wants to be there. That's why we used to be able to put that person there. But now, perhaps if that person has too much of an affinity for it, from the government's view, and asks too many tough questions, they'll solve that problem. They'll try to take that person off the committee. And then we'll have to sub them back in again.

I don't understand why a government with a majority even bothers. Wouldn't you want—really, for democracy to work, for this House to work at its best, for the committee to work at its best, you would want the opposition—whether it's a recognized party or independent, you would want to have the best people at committee with the most interest in those issues to give the hardest questions so that the best legislation possible could come out of that committee.

The government has a majority. They are going to get their legislation through. Let's not kid ourselves. A majority is going to get the legislation through. A majority at the committee—the government has a majority at the committee. There will not be an amendment passed that the government doesn't like. There are very few opposition amendments passed, but there is not going to be one amendment passed at any committee in this House that the government doesn't like.

They have a majority, but that's not enough. That's not enough. They also, for whatever reason, have to have the power to pick the opposition members on the committee. It's silly in a way. It is silly in a way, and again, we'll work around it. It's not the end of the world. Despite the roadblocks, the silly little infantile roadblocks that the government puts forward, the opposition will continue to do our job. It will just be extra paperwork for everybody, extra sub slips, extra running around.

What it actually is—it's extra red tape.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you for that. It's red tape created by the government that claims to be anti-red tape. But when it comes to legislation and how this place works, they love red tape that protects them. They love red tape that protects them.

While I am on committee—I was at a committee, the committee of the interior. I'm the House leader; I'm very rarely on committee. I am kind of a jack of all trades. If something goes wrong, they put me in, and it usually goes worse.

But anyway, the committee of the interior: It was an organizational meeting for a bill, a bill we all agreed on, and the first thing that happened was that it went in closed session. So I can't talk about what happened, but I can talk about what I said before it went in closed session, and I brought up the point that why and for what reason do you need to make an organizational meeting in closed session? It's a simple thing. Why would you do that in closed session? Why would you make people distrust the political system even more? There is a massive distrust of the political system. We all can feel it, and yet the government of the day continues to do—again, is that going to create a

massive outcry across the province? No—let’s be serious—but it just adds that level of mistrust that isn’t needed.

For the government to try and play around with which member of the opposition is on which committee, and do it not once in a while but do it on a fairly continuous basis—quite honestly, you have to question the government’s—I won’t even use the word “motive,” because there’s not really a practical purpose for this. They get done what they need to get done regardless of this. This is micromanagement at its ultimate. It’s, “How can we just exact that little bit of extra pain?” That’s what this feels like, for no obvious purpose. It doesn’t benefit the people of Ontario. It certainly doesn’t benefit the official opposition. It doesn’t really benefit the independents either. I don’t even see what it does for the government.

The standing orders have changed enough that they can ram their legislation through so fast that who is sitting on the committee doesn’t make a lot of difference, so I question why they’re even bothering. Specifically, the government never wants to change standing orders again, and, if they ever want to reintroduce an inkling of trust in the system, they should change the standing orders back so that members of the officially recognized parties could pick their own committee members. That would be a sign that the government is actually learning.

Do you know why the government needs to learn? On this closing point, why the government needs to learn how to use the Legislature and how to use committees: I think this government holds the record—certainly the modern-time Ontario record—of introducing legislation and then having to rescind it, continually. Bill 124, that wasn’t the first one. There was the one I call the “Men in Black bill,” where they wanted to take constitutional rights away, and we rescinded it so far that it never existed. It was rescinded back to the day before it was created. If the government was using the Legislature and using the committee system as it was designed, perhaps bills wouldn’t have gotten through the way they were in the first place.

Again, the government is going to get their way. There’s nobody arguing that they won the election. When you win an election, you get to put your agenda through. It’s up to the opposition to point out the problems in the legislation, and believe me, on those ones, like on Bill 124, you cannot say that the opposition did not point out the problems on Bill 124—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: The greenbelt.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, I even forgot the greenbelt legislation. It’s not that we didn’t point that out, that there were going to be some problems, but the government didn’t listen. And yet, they still do these little micro-management—focus here and focus there.

Again, I’ve taken enough time. We are opposed to this change, because of what I’ve put on—but that concludes my remarks.

1350

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

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say “aye.”

All those opposed, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Interjection: On division.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Carried on division.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO PLACE

Mr. Chris Glover: I wasn’t quite ready, Madam Speaker, but—hang on, one second. Apologies. I was sleeping at the switch there. This petition is entitled “Save Ontario Place.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario Place has been a cherished public space for over 50 years, providing joy, recreation and cultural experiences for Ontarians and tourists alike and holds cultural and historical significance as a landmark that symbolizes Ontario’s commitment to innovation, sustainability and public engagement;

“Whereas redevelopment that includes a private, profit-driven venture by an Austrian spa company prioritizes commercial interests over the needs and desires of the people of Ontario, and it is estimated that the cost to prepare the grounds for redevelopment and build a 2,000-car underground garage will cost approximately \$650 million...;

“Whereas meaningful public consultations with diverse stakeholders have not been adequately conducted and the Ontario NDP has sent a letter of support for a public request to begin an investigation into a value-for-money and compliance audit with respect to proposed redevelopment of Ontario Place;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to halt any further development plans for Ontario Place, engage in meaningful and transparent public consultations to gather input and ideas for the future of Ontario Place, develop a comprehensive and sustainable plan for the revitalization of Ontario Place that prioritizes environmental sustainability, accessibility and inclusivity, and ensure that any future development of Ontario Place is carried out in a transparent and accountable manner, with proper oversight, public input and adherence to democratic processes.”

I support this petition, will affix my signature and pass it to page Mercy to take to the table.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have a petition here to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

“Pause the Expansion of Methane-Fired Electricity Generation.

“We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pause the expansion of methane-fired electricity generation and evaluate the role of renewable energy and storage, conservation, distributed energy resources, and municipal net-zero plans in meeting Ontario’s electricity needs.”

I will affix my name to this petition and send it with page Jeremy.

TUITION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am proud to advance this petition that has been signed by thousands of college and university students from across the province. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased by 215%, and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

“Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of 9.5 years to repay; and

“Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011 and 2021, and in colleges, they pay an average of \$14,306 annually compared to the average domestic fee of \$3,228; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in 2018-19, resulting in over a \$1-billion cut in assistance to students; and

“Whereas the so-called Student Choice Initiative was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students’ groups;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario’s call and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to (1) free and accessible education for all, (2) grants, not loans, and (3) legislate students’ right to organize.”

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

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have another petition today.

“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’m happy to support this petition to do the right thing, and I’m going to send it with page Anushga.

TUITION

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I have a petition here titled “Fight the Fees,” and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased by 215%, and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

“Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of 9.5 years to repay; and

“Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011 and 2021, and in colleges, they pay an average of \$14,306 annually compared to the average domestic fee of \$3,228; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in 2018-19, resulting in over a \$1-billion cut in assistance to students; and

“Whereas the so-called Student Choice Initiative was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students’ groups;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario’s call and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to (1) free and accessible education for all, (2) grants, not loans, and (3) legislate students’ right to organize.”

I’m proud to affix my signature to it, and I will pass it to the table through Max.

TUITION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have a petition here.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas since 1980, whilst accounting for inflation, the average domestic undergraduate tuition has increased by 215%, and the average domestic graduate tuition by 247%; and

“Whereas upon graduation, 50% of students will have a median debt of around \$17,500, which takes an average of 9.5 years to repay; and

“Whereas the average undergraduate tuition for international students has increased by 192% between 2011 and 2021, and in colleges, they pay an average of \$14,306 annually compared to the average domestic fee of \$3,228; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario made changes to OSAP and student financial assistance in 2018-19, resulting in over a \$1-billion cut in assistance to students; and

“Whereas the so-called Student Choice Initiative was defeated in the courts, students need legislation to protect their right to organize and funding for students’ groups;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, support the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario’s call and petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to commit to (1) free and accessible education for all, (2) grants, not loans, and (3) legislate students’ right to organize.”

1400

I support this petition. I’ll sign it and give it to page Skye to deliver to the table.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I’m very proud to be submitting this petition to the House.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Support Gender-Affirming Health Care.

“Whereas two-spirit, transgender, non-binary, gender-diverse, and intersex communities face significant challenges to accessing health care services that are friendly, competent, and affirming in Ontario;

“Whereas everyone deserves access to health care, and they shouldn’t have to fight for it, shouldn’t have to wait for it, and should never receive less care or support because of who they are;

“Whereas gender-affirming care is life-saving care;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the reintroduction of a private member’s bill to create an inclusive and representative committee to advise the Ministry of Health on how to realize accessible and equitable access to and coverage for gender-affirming health care in Ontario.”

I’m very proud to sign this petition and send it to the centre table with page Isaac. And I look forward to the debate tonight.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas there is overwhelming evidence to show that paid sick days significantly reduce the spread of infectious disease, promote preventive health care and reduce health care system costs; and

“Whereas 60% of Ontario workers do not have access to paid sick days, and cannot afford to lose their pay if they are sick; and

“Whereas low-wage and precarious workers are the most likely to be denied paid sick days; and

“Whereas enabling workers to stay home when they are sick without losing pay helps limit the spread of illness in the workplace and allows workers to recover faster; and

“Whereas during an infectious disease emergency, it is unreasonable and dangerous to public health to make

workers choose between protecting their communities and providing for their families; and

“Whereas legislating paid sick days through the Employment Standards Act, with transitional financial support for struggling small businesses, will ensure that workers have seamless, uninterrupted access to their pay;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately amend the Employment Standards Act to provide Ontario workers with 10 employer-paid days of personal emergency leave each year and additional paid sick leave in the case of an infectious disease emergency.”

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

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “To Raise Social Assistance Rates,” and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s social assistance rates are well below Canada’s official Market Basket Measure poverty line and 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 could not agree more. I will affix my signature to it and give it to page Anushga to bring to the table.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I bring this petition on behalf of Denise Dillon of Toronto. We are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to extend access to post-adoption birth information.

“Whereas current legislation does not provide access to post-adoption birth information (identifying information) to next of kin if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased;

“Whereas this barrier to accessing post-adoption birth information separates immediate family members and prohibits the children of deceased adopted people from gaining knowledge of their identity and possible Indigenous heritage;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to extend access to post-adoption birth information ... to next of kin, and/or extended next of kin, if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased.”

I fully support this petition. I will sign it and pass it to page Max to deliver to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GET IT DONE ACT, 2024

LOI DE 2024 POUR PASSER À L'ACTION

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 29, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 162, An Act to enact the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act, 2024 and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 162, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la protection contre les taxes sur le carbone et modifiant diverses lois.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I'll be sharing my time today with the amazing and passionate member from Scarborough–Guildwood.

The Get It Done Act: What does this bill actually get done for the people of Ontario? Does it help the health care crisis? No, no mention of that. Fix the education system? Nope, no mention of that. Housing affordability? Nope, no mention of that, just promoting more sprawl. Address the climate crisis? Nope, it will actually make that one worse.

This bill would amend the Environmental Assessment Act to explicitly allow provincial and municipal governments to expropriate land before environmental approvals. The bill, however, offers few details about how wide-ranging these powers would be or how they would play out on the ground, and we all know the devil is in the details.

The environment minister won't even directly answer questions about how she will make sure these changes won't harm the environment—wow, the Minister of the Environment not sure about how she will prevent harm to the environment. She said the goal is to streamline the environment and assessment process, which has been historically been “slow and complex” with “too much red tape.” Well, if the minister is so interested in red tape reduction, I hear there's an opening in that ministry.

Biodiversity is one of the most precious and important things we have. Maybe this government thinks it's merely something that's nice to look at and enjoy spending time in, but actually, it's so much more. Without biodiversity, our entire support system for human as well as animal life would collapse. We rely on nature to provide us with food and clean water, for a lot of medicines and to prevent flooding and other extreme weather events.

So much is provided by the natural ecosystems around us. They are truly vital to life on earth. The government may think, “Okay, we can just trash one bit or remove a

species, and it will all be okay.” But the different plants and animals are interconnected in vital ways that we don't even always understand.

Biodiversity loss is at an all-time high: Southern Ontario alone has lost more than 70% of its wetland habitats, 98% of its grasslands and 80% of its forests. Over 200 plants and animal species are classified as at risk of becoming extinct in Ontario. We need to tirelessly work hard to preserve what we do have left, not pave over paradise. We can't survive if we don't have our ecosystem. That means our farmlands, our wetlands, our flood plains—the very things that would be impacted by this bill.

Might I add that while the government continues to ram through Highway 413 they directly have a highway that runs along the same corridor. The government could be bold and fiscally responsible by moving truck traffic onto Highway 407. This would solve freight congestion right now at a much lower cost and a vastly lower upfront cost, less than the \$10 billion it would cost to build the environmentally disastrous Highway 413.

In 2022, the Premier himself even admitted it was a big mistake for the Progressive Conservatives to privatize Highway 407, so why not rectify that now and instead of promising to impose no tolls on highways that already have no tolls take some real action and allow trucks to use the 407 toll-free? I would say, “Kill two birds with one stone,” but I believe in preserving biodiversity and the lives of wildlife, unlike this government.

1410

Just for the record, Highway 413 will raze 2,000 acres of farmland, cut across 85 waterways and pave over 400 acres of protected greenbelt land. It would also disrupt 220 wetlands and the habitats of 10 species at risk. The Bradford Bypass would cross 27 waterways and slash through environmentally sensitive Holland Marsh lands, impacting about 39 hectares of wildlife habitat and 11 hectares of wetlands. The government hears that and says, “Let's do it,” instead of using an underutilized highway that is already built.

They love cancelling things. Just look at the 758 renewable energy projects they cancelled when they first took office. Why not cancel the tolls on trucks for the 407?

Yesterday there was a 20-degree jump in temperature in a matter of one day. The climate change is in front of our eyes. If this government plans to continue on this, the Get It Done Act is a misguided attempt that sacrifices long-term sustainability and social equity for short-term gain. We cannot afford to prioritize hasty development over thoughtful planning and responsible governance. We must focus on the well-being of our communities and the preservation of our environment.

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

MPP Andrea Hazell: I am pleased to stand here and debate this government's Get It Done Act, or, more accurately, let's say the “get it not-so-done act,” because, as Ontarians know, actions speak louder than words. The members opposite say that this legislation will help build

highways. That's strange, because I read this bill up and down and there isn't anything about building highways. As my colleague from Beaches–East York put it so well, all that's in there is stripping environmental protections.

I came back from a tour of the north as a member of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. I learned a lot. The north is so beautiful, and the people are so warm and kind. Transportation-wise, I heard a lot about the importance of twinning highways up there. The highways up there are particularly dangerous, with only one lane per direction. That's tight driving, especially in wintertime. There is not much room to manoeuvre, and accidents are far too common. When a lane is shut down, that's the whole highway being shut down, and guess what? That is added pressure to their daily economic productivity.

I want to share with you the accidents that recently happened on Highway 69:

- a 65-year-old passed away in November after a collision on Highway 69, north of the Magnetawan River Bridge, which is an untwinned portion of the highway;
- a nonfatal crash in March on the same section; and
- two seniors died in a crash in February of 2022 in the untwinned portion south of Pointe au Baril;

On Highways 11 and 17:

- a pedestrian was killed by a pickup truck on untwinned Highway 17 two days ago in the Sault Ste. Marie area;
- a Thunder Bay woman was killed in untwinned Highway 17 crash with a commercial vehicle last month;
- two teens were killed on untwinned Highway 17 crash in October;
- one person is dead after a two-vehicle collision in the township of Calder on untwinned Highway 11 in July.

I could go on, because it's not done, but I hope you get the point about why we've got an issue with this Get It Done Act. This government has slowed down the twinning of Highways 11, 17 and even Highway 69. Not one kilometre started under this government's watch.

Everyone in the northeast wants to see Highway 69 twinned: the municipalities, the Sudbury and Timmins chambers of commerce, everyone. But this government legislation is a missed opportunity to actually focus on expanding these crucial highways and to follow through with this government's commitments. But we're not going to see shovels in the ground from this bill, only more empty promises.

Furthermore, this legislation is taking a proud stance against highway tolls. Here's the problem: There is only one toll road in Ontario, and this bill won't do anything about it. Highway 407 will continue to charge Ontarians an arm and a leg, especially during an affordability crisis—and this government is A-okay with that? But of course they are, because it was the Conservatives who privatized it in the first place.

The members opposite claim this legislation will prevent tolls on the Gardiner and Don Valley Parkway. That's funny because only one person ever proposed tolling those roads: former Conservative leader John Tory.

This is just another bill for this government where the only purpose is to reverse the Conservatives' bad ideas, just like the greenbelt.

Ontarians deserve serious legislation to address serious problems, not these performative stunts. Everyone wants things to get done, so stop wasting crucial legislative time on bills like this and introduce bills to actually get the work done. Just because it's in the name doesn't mean it's true.

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

I recognize the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Interjection.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Are you debating? Okay. Sorry.

My question is for the member for Scarborough–Guildwood. Thank you for your speech today. This bill shows yet again that the only people in this province this government gets it done for are insiders, developers and donors, and they think the people of Ontario don't see what they're up to. So the fact that this bill is proposing to remove tolls on highways that don't have tolls but not remove tolls on highways that do have tolls, like the 407—this is asinine.

My question to you is, do you think the people of Ontario are duped by this performative bill?

MPP Andrea Hazell: To the member: Thank you for this question. That's why I'm here debating this portion of Highway 407. This government talks about putting money back into Ontarians' pockets. My question is, we can take this opportunity, open the 407; do not have the tolls in 407, and that is going to save Ontarians a lot of dollars in their pockets during an affordability crisis. Let's get that done.

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

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: My question is for the member from Beaches–East York. This bill calls highways low-impact environmentally. Can you explain why highways are not low-impact to the climate?

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: As you know, right now, the ridiculous proposal for Highway 413 is being considered by the federal government. They're worried about the biodiversity loss with that highway, and as we know there are safer, healthier options. Definitely we need to drive. I drive my vehicle. I also ride my bike. I also take transit. I also walk. We want to get people out of cars as best we can. We are woefully behind in building transit in this province, in this country, and primarily there's a holdup because of this government.

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

Hon. Stan Cho: The member from Scarborough–Guildwood brings up the twinning of Highway 69—an important issue; this government has done more than half of that—and also brings up several other highways because we regard twinning highways as important because people need to get from point A to point B. But what I'm confused about is that the member right next to her just says how it's no good to build any highways throughout this province. So one member is saying, "Build the highways, expand the highways," and the member

right next door is saying, “Don’t build highways, don’t extend the networks.” So I’m trying to square this.

Speaker, the question back to either member is, which do you stand for: no highways or more highways?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to member from Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you very much for putting words in my mouth that weren’t there, but that’s kind of a classic comment from across the way: “I will take no lessons from you.”

1420

I will take no lessons on climate action from this government because you’ve been failing from the beginning, starting with the throne speech not having the words “climate change” in it. You’re allergic to those words. I know you break out in hives and you need a defibrillator whenever you hear them. But I will take no lessons from your lack of action and leaving people’s children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews at risk for the future because you can’t even say those words or do anything about it.

Where’s the action? Where is it? The world is waiting.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The titles that come from this government are very inaccurate for what actions are really happening under the content of their legislation. I think back to when the government started, originally with the licence plates. That was a debacle. Then they went to ServiceOntario and they sole-sourced ServiceOntario to Staples. We’ll see how that debacle turns out, because nobody knew that was coming. Also renewing the permits on your plates; that was a debacle. People are driving with expired plates and being fined for that.

I want to ask the member: She talked about the 407. What would real change look like if this government took real responsibility and got it done and took the tolls off the 407 to make life more affordable for people driving every day to work in Toronto?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Scarborough–Guildwood.

MPP Andrea Hazell: To the member, thank you for that question. I’m going to state again that the toll on the 407 is very expensive. Ontarians are facing a massive affordability crisis, and removing those tolls is just going to better the families of Ontario. It’s going to put more money into the people of Ontario’s pockets. Open up the 407—it’s going to help with the gridlock—and get off of Highway 413.

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

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank both speakers for their comments. I’ll say this: Having worked in the municipality and having to come against some of the environmental assessment restrictions that do add costs that could otherwise be better spent on actual environmental remediation, do you see an opportunity nonetheless in improving the regulations that do exist so that we’re not

spending far more without a resulting outcome, and we’re simply spending more on a project?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Of course, I always like questions from my favourite MPP across the way. Thank you for that.

Yes, I’m always for—I’m not going to say “efficiencies” because that word has been used—

Interjection: Hijacked.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Hijacked, yes, that word has been hijacked. I’m for efficiencies. Time is money to builders, developers, planners, to everyone. Time is money to Ontarians. So if there’s any way we can do a little bit of streamlining, I’m all for it.

The problem is I think people have lost faith in this government when they do things because they’re either just bulldozing in to do something and then reversing on it, or wasting people’s time. I do feel there is a chance to do that, but can this government do it? I don’t know.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It might come as a surprise to many, but conservation authorities were first established by Conservatives generations ago in this province. I think a round of applause for them, right? Yes. Now, generations later, we’ve got this.

My question to either of you is simply this: What do you trust more: the results of an environmental assessment or the advice of a Tory Minister of the Environment?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Pick your poison, I guess. You’re absolutely right. There have been great environmental measures by some Conservative governments. We’re thinking Bill Davis; we’re thinking Robarts.

Interjection: Mulroney.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Yes, Mulroney—lots of good, strong initiatives. The conservation authorities, for sure—established under a Conservative government. This government can’t even say the words “climate change,” can’t even think anything beyond “EVs for climate action.” Sorry, news flash: EVs are not going to solve the climate emergency. Maybe you can learn from your predecessors in your party. Just get out some textbooks, talk to some people and actually get creating strong climate action. Don’t be afraid.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Final question?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the speakers for their comments. Perhaps the member from Beaches–East York—first of all, I’m a little bit hurt. See, I thought that I was her favourite member. But anyway, I’ll get over it.

I want to talk about transit, because—and I’ve got a brother and sister-in-law that live in that riding, in your riding. They talk about transit all the time. This government is investing the most in transit in the history of the province, everywhere. In the city: 34 years, no transit built—we’re getting it done. Isn’t that something

the member can support, and will it not have benefits for members in her riding?

MPP Andrea Hazell: That is a very good question. Thank you for asking that. The people of Scarborough, the people of my riding, have been punished in commuting and travelling back and forth to get where they need to go in Scarborough for the past six years. You talk about investing in transportation in Scarborough, so while I welcome that, I get it—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): That's all the time we have for that round of questions and answers. Further debate?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: It's such a privilege to be able to speak to Bill 162 today. I'm so grateful to be here at Queen's Park—I've been here with my colleagues now about a year, a year and a half—and just to be able to provide input and to provide some context to some of the decisions and how they may benefit or not benefit our local communities.

I think one of the most controversial projects that I had back in my former council ward in the town of Tecumseh was the construction of a multi-use path alongside Riverside Drive. That is an identified route for the Trans Canada Trail, the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail, and soon, hopefully, we will get some connectivity with the rest of the trail, once the gaps get filled in.

One of the most strenuous debates was with a couple of people who I know well. They're really very partisan Liberal activists, but they did not approve of the use of the municipal class environmental assessment A+ schedule, which actually pre-authorizes multi-use trails. They thought the trail needed to have a more thorough investigation as to the impacts of public safety and security, health, environment—for example, will a 12-foot path have a significant amount of runoff that would cause flooding or give cause for flooding? This trail ended up being a debate for probably two and a half years, at which point, when it was finally done, the escalation and price that we've seen in construction increased the cost by about \$1.5 million. Initially, it looked like it was coming in over budget. The federal government gave a grant, but then that was all eaten away and then some by just the consumer price index increases. Ultimately, we had the same result, but the way that—who could know? If we still had to go through a schedule B municipal class environmental assessment, that would have added a significant amount of time to getting this trail built and connecting to the great trails that we have in our glorious country.

And so, when I see opportunities to streamline the environmental assessment, do just like what the McGuinty government did and introduce schedule A prime, that's a good thing—because there are certain projects that you will undertake in a municipality that are routine. They're the same every single time.

I designed sewers and sewer systems. I designed bike paths. I didn't design a building in full, but I administered the project. That particular project, I'll get into a bit later, but do you know what? When I design a sewer, I submit to the MECP for my approval. It is a very set process. You

know what the application is, you submit your drawings, you submit your sewer design sheets and you have certainty. The only thing you are uncertain about is the review timeline from the ministry.

1430

Now, with recent changes, the linear assets evolution at the ministry, that's actually left in the hands of the municipality. I see that as, again, a good thing. A professional engineer must stamp a drawing and a design. It doesn't matter how long ago I did that design; I'm responsible if I fail in my job, in my duty as a professional engineer.

So when one approaches engineering design with a lens of skepticism, that we're all unethical as engineers when we design—and unfortunately, I've heard that sort of suggestion in a couple of debates that we've had. I'll say, number one, I want to serve the public as a professional engineer, and those who are involved with environmental assessments want to serve the public too. It doesn't matter if you're a land use planner—sometimes it's a biologist—you take your knocks.

Going through the process, public consultation, is a key part of the environmental assessment process. You have to go through it. Schedule B: You're required to do one project meeting and then you can create a project file at the tail end. Schedule C: You have to have a minimum of two public meetings and do a thorough report. Now, as a fail-safe, you want to do a whole report just in case there is a—it used to be a bump-up request that the minister used to deliver; now, again, that's the decision of council.

At the end of the day, you do a biological assessment. You do an archaeological assessment. You do a storm water assessment. You do a traffic assessment. You spend a lot of money on studies to make sure that things are going right. It's clockwork when you have a process that is set and established. You know what you need to do. So in the case of what the previous government did with schedule A-1, again, it's a good thing. I support it. It means that what is routine and default should not result in unnecessary delays to achieving the societal good that your project would bring in.

Changes to the EA process to provide a wider breadth of scoped projects, ones where you know what you're getting—a waste water treatment facility—you get newer technology, but, fundamentally, you can write out the design with a pen and paper. You know what the processes are for cleaning water. You know you have primary treatment. Ideally, you will have secondary treatment. In a perfect world, maybe we'd have tertiary treatment; that isn't compulsory. But the secondary treatment is one where you can decide: Do you use light? Do you use ultraviolet? Do you use ozonation? Do you use membrane technology? It doesn't matter. At the end of the day, there are only so many technologies out there and so many directions you can go down.

There are certainly opportunities to standardize a process, to introduce a quicker process and to ensure that you don't run into unnecessary delays and barriers in trying to achieve public good. Cleaning water is a public

good. Providing a bike lane is a public good. And yes, building a neighbourhood street, rebuilding a neighbourhood street—hereby called a “highway,” but the Highway Traffic Act includes all roads, including that 20-foot-wide lane. That’s what a highway is. It’s not a freeway.

So at the end of the day, there are plenty of great reasons for which to make the kinds of changes that are being proposed here. It’s not just for municipal infrastructure; it’s private infrastructure as well. It’s actually—I call it more stringent, because now you have geotechnical reports, whether it’s private or public or municipal, but they go through more intensive environmental site assessments. You have to prove that there’s no contamination on your property. Like, if your property was a gas station at one point, hey, you need to clean that soil. Again, it comes back to, as a designer, as a professional, you’re not doing your job and you are unethical if you don’t do your due diligence.

Now, adding the kind of—call it “public contact points” and all of what that entails—there’s merit to having public consultation, but sometimes that public consultation is repetitive. If you’re trying to improve storm water or add active transportation facilities and people don’t like it, well, you’re going to have some battles in front of you. And you know what? You can solve those projects on a political basis: Tell your city council not to fund it. But to actually encumber the process by politicizing it, effectively, instead of making it on a technical basis isn’t the best approach. It’s one of the flaws that we’ve had in our environmental assessment system. I’m happy to see the depoliticization and standardization of environmental assessments that are being called for in this legislation.

Not only did I serve as councillor, but I served as a designer in the municipality. I worked with contractors of many types. I’m representing the public good. In fact, I was the drainage superintendent as well. I was the regulator. I would say no. I had to impose the conditions of the Drainage Act. A lot of them are costly, and people push back. And you know what? Sometimes I’d agree with them. We were creating work for the sake of creating work. There’s no measurable benefit.

I think of a culvert installation on a property that’s on a drain that was established 120 years ago. If someone wants to move that culvert, they can’t just move the culvert and replace like with like. They actually have to go and do an entire drainage assessment of the whole drain—the entire length—to see what the impact is, even though the culvert next door is the same size on both sides so this particular culvert change is not going to change the flow. That’s where engineering judgment comes into play.

You need to be sensible with your decision-making, and sometimes the rules that we have imposed upon ourselves really detract from that. They add costs. They add time. And that cost that you’re wasting could be used for actual environmental remediation, actual environmental improvement, not just bringing process into it and having study after study when you know it’s not necessary or, worse yet, it has no bearing.

It’s a pretty cumbersome process to develop a property today. I think of the fire hall project that I went through. I

know I’ve heard some concerns over the prospect of—call it weakening environmental regulation and, particularly, species at risk. The municipality can afford to wait—I worked for a municipality—and put in the time and money. So when all was said and done, a \$5-million fire station project that I had that was delayed for two and a half years because of the efforts to get a beneficial-use-impairment permit and all that entailed—which was a three-to-one land compensation elsewhere and 10 years of monitoring on-site for snakes, the willowleaf aster and Butler’s garter snake, in addition to a number of construction techniques that were explicitly developed to ensure no harming of the snakes. This was after we had spent 30 days with a person on the site visibly pulling out every snake we could find to be able to relocate them to the offset site.

So in compiling the costs, it was a full million dollars and counting for the future monitoring added to the project cost. I look back at that—we only have so much we have in our household. We earn a paycheque; we try to provide for our kids, we try to take care of our parents, and we want to do the best that we can for them. When we’re diverting funds to engage in activity that really accomplishes no environmental improvement, to me that doesn’t feel like a win.

1440

Having the standardization, as this is proposing, will set clear rules and clear compensation for the environmental impact in a standardized way. You know what you’re getting into. You spend the money to achieve that environmental improvement. It’s very definitive. This is something that is a way to not only reduce the cost, which we all would love to do so we can invest in other things, but it also significantly reduces the time spent on a project.

My very first project, which was dealing with basement flooding—and I mean sanitary basement flooding—was back in 2006. There’s a company called Amico Infrastructures that was the first contractor that I dealt with. Not too long ago, in learning about the government’s changes, the president of that company actually submitted some comments about this legislation. Dominic Amicone, the president of Amico, said: “Environmental assessment processes exist to recognize and protect the sometimes-delicate balance of the environments in which our clients build and operate. These new MECP initiatives will help manage the equally delicate balance of streamlining development while ensuring appropriate environmental protections. Amico supports policy innovations that facilitate near-term initiatives and long-term sustainability.”

Amico is an expert on this, because they were also a contractor on the fire station; they’re the contractor on the Gordie Howe International Bridge that had a significant amount of compensation involved. In fact, we have a whole linear network of trails that was put in by the previous government. I give them full credit; they spent a ton of money taking care of the natural environment in Windsor and LaSalle. If you go down Highway 401, on your way to the new bridge—you can’t access it yet because it’s not built yet, but the rest of the freeway has

been there for about 10 years now—you will see the environmental compensation. You will see the wildlife crossings that they have brought in and all of the offsets that that project entailed. There are, again, ways to standardize this type of compensation, where you set the rules in advance and you ensure that you deliver excellent value all across the board. So I'm very happy to see that Amico—this was unsolicited by me—came out and showed some support for this.

Further, municipalities get the phone calls, just like we get phone calls as MPPs. The city council just wants to see some achievements for their time, too, and their investment. Why does it take two, three, four years to resurface a street? I'm exaggerating a little bit with this; the street rehabilitation is pre-approved, but a street expansion is not. If you have a schedule B or a schedule C process, you are going to be spending an inordinate amount of time trying to reach a conclusion that you generally know is already going to work. Ultimately, you do need some degree of public consultation, but there are times when you need public consultation—other routine projects—where it really does not add value.

I've actually hosted, as I've administered environmental assessments under the MCEA—six people attended over a three-hour period, and their only ask was, "How much will it cost me?" So when I see that Bill 162 proposes to address some of these obvious deficiencies that we know we have and that municipalities support—actually, we've got AMO who says, "Modernized environmental assessment processes are a critical enabler for housing, streamlining processes for municipalities to help them build infrastructure like roads, sewers, and water systems more quickly. The initiatives announced today take a risk-based approach to environmental management, removing red tape for straightforward municipal infrastructure projects and focusing resources where they are needed most. AMO looks forward to continuing to work with the ministry on implementation details." That's Colin Best, AMO president and regional councillor for Halton. I know Mr. Best has been quoted extensively as being an expert in these chambers, and so I hope that Mr. Best's contributions to this carry the same weight that they did for some of his previous comments on other pieces of legislation.

I see I'm running out of time. I just have about a minute left, and I only touched a small part of this bill. There's a lot more—I think of road tolls. The city of Windsor would like to have tolls on E.C. Row Expressway to toll for the county residents who use that road. Obviously it's not a provincial highway but, look, there's a prospect and discussion for road tolls, and the government is saying very definitively this should not be part of our future. A gas tax is an absolutely more efficient way to raise funds. There's a whole lot of infrastructure and paperwork involved with road tolls. So if you're looking at the best way to actually levy a charge on a driver, the gas tax has the least amount of costs and has the most amount of revenue that you can carry forward.

There are arguments in favour of tolls; don't get me wrong, but if you're looking to make life easier for

Ontarians, this is not the way to go. Anyway, thank you very much, Speaker.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocvic: I listened intently to the member, and he's certainly an expert in his field. I know he cares deeply about the people of Ontario and his community, and I was so impressed with his speech. I heard him say that he believes the most efficient way forward is a gas tax, obviously. That is the most equitable way. Could you tell us a little bit more about why you believe that's the case?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I appreciate that question from the member, and I think I understand where you might be going with it, given the government has reduced the gas tax. But at the end of the day, when you're comparing versus tolls, the differential is shrunken. But previously for tolls, you had a person staying there—actually the border crossings in my community still have a person. You're creating jobs by having toll booths, and now as we evolve to more of an electronic version, you don't need those jobs. So in fact, yes, there's a loss of jobs with automation, but it's actually a big cost driver. The gas tax way is something that's just tied to the cost as you fill up at the pump, and you don't have the spending involved with the collection of tolls versus the gas tax. You don't have a lot of spending involved with collecting a gas tax, and that's the basis for my opinion.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Windsor for a great analysis. I wanted to get your perspective on what this bill is doing in terms of affordability for the people of Ontario. The opposition, I know, has mentioned over and over again this is a "nothing burger" bill. I want to read what Stephen Laskowski, president of the Ontario Trucking Association, was quoted as saying: "This is also the type of legislative measure that all governments should be looking at to control inflation and help the entire supply chain and families reduce their costs."

There's also supportive quotes from Vince Accardi from the Ontario Motor Coach Association and multiple mayors across the province, including the previous Liberal leader himself, Steven Del Duca.

So my question to the member is, if the opposition feels that this is a "nothing burger" bill, do you feel all these mayors and all these representatives of various businesses and stakeholder groups in the province feel it's a "nothing burger" bill as well?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member from Oakville for that question. Really, there are a lot of savings here. I think just back to the previous question on the tolls. You're actually paying twice. You're paying through your gas tax and your toll. So if you're paying the same each time, in just one way of charging a driver—and charge them fairly—you're reducing the cost.

I know for the 412 and 418, \$68 million is the estimated five-year savings for the drivers in Durham region. I know the member from Oshawa spoke, and very passionately,

about the importance of removing those tolls, and I certainly applaud her for her advocacy on that.

1450

Also, the freezing of driver's licence charges and fees: \$22 million since that freeze came in and then \$66 million to come between now and 2029—so that's money back into people's pockets by initiating these changes. In an affordability crisis, we need to help, as government, keep money in people's pockets, not keep on taking it away from our families.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for his presentation. A question regarding schedule 6 of this bill: Schedule 6 prohibits tolls on highways, but those highways that the government is “removing tolls from” are highways that already don't have tolls. The one highway that does have true tolls is Highway 407, and this bill does not remove the tolls on Highway 407. It's the same highway where this government inexplicably waived a billion dollars in congestion penalties.

Can the member please explain, why would you remove tolls on highways that don't have tolls but keep the tolls on highways that do have tolls?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: It's a very good question. What's the fair thing to do? When the 407 was pitched by the former Rae government, they said it was going to be tolled. In fact, it wouldn't have been built truly absent those tolls to get the capital in hand. And now, we're paying back the cost of the highway, and I know there's a lot of history and a lot of thoughts about that. But 407 is tolled. We know it's tolled. Everyone has known it's been tolled, from day one. What people are not terribly happy about is when a road that they paid for through their existing taxes, their existing gas taxes, becomes tolled, because they've already paid for it. Should they pay a second time? The maintenance can come from our gas tax, and that's truly the key difference. If you've already paid for the road, you shouldn't toll it after the fact.

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

Mr. Sherif Sabawy: Thank you to my colleague who did a good presentation. My question is—as we know, we have only one taxpayer, one person who is paying every fee, every tax. By cutting the gas tax, by cutting licence plate renewal fees, by freezing the drivers' licence fees—also, One Fare, which was just announced last week—we are saving more than \$1,600 per person annually using public transportation. All this cost-cutting is saving money, putting money back in the pockets of the people of Ontario.

Can my colleague tell me what this will affect in the day-to-day life of the people of Ontario who are struggling to make ends meet?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I think we all get the calls about how difficult it is to pay our bills today. There's paying our rent, paying for our food, and when we are able to reduce

the burden that government adds to your day-to-day life, the money you pay, you get services back. That's absolutely a fact. But when you are having a process just for the sake of having it—think of the licence plate stickers. What did that deliver in terms of public safety improvements? What did it deliver in terms of a benefit for you as a citizen, except for creating a revenue stream? So that's gone. That's money back in pockets of families across Ontario. With the freezes on fees for the driver's licence permit changes, we are going to keep those costs low. With technology, there's no need to grow the cost; we can make those processes more efficient with IT. They're already in place. There's no legitimate reason to keep on growing the cost when the cost to deliver the service goes down.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I'd never blame the member for the past, but the 407 and rates that they charge are really the past of the Conservative Party. In the last session of government, the 407 actually broke the terms of the contract, in the sense that they did not collect enough, they did not have enough ridership on their highway, and that triggered a penalty of a billion dollars to the province of Ontario. Your government, the one you didn't sit in yet, decided, “Hey, 407, we don't need a billion dollars. Keep it.” Would you have decided the same thing had you been sitting in this chair?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you for the question. I appreciate the member for reminding me of my grade school days when that government was in office. I think there are a lot of lessons to learn. I know the 407 was built from a P3 partnership that was, I think, the first of its kind, if I remember right. Kudos to the Rae government for going down that road, to at least explore something new. We can get sterile and stale if we keep on doing the same thing over and over again. It was an innovative way to get that road built, because the province did not have the funds on hand to get it done otherwise. If we have congestion, we need to build. This is why the infrastructure bank is so exciting, because now we don't have to put debt on future generations. We can bring in more revenue or more investment to be able to pay for the infrastructure that we need today. I hope that answers the question.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It's always an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Humber River–Black Creek, my lifelong home.

I'd like to begin today's debate just asking the simple question as to how the government comes up with names for their bills. I've heard rumours. One rumour is that the guy responsible actually designs bumper stickers, because we're debating the Get It Done Act.

Now, another thing that I've thought and I've heard, actually, is that they've got, essentially, a cauldron full of random words put together, and someone reaches in and pulls them out, and that's how you're able to get something like Get It Done. You read this and you have no idea what we're talking about. If it's the destruction of

health care in this province, they're getting it done; that's for sure. There's many different ways in which they're getting it done.

I'm going to tell you a little bit about what they're doing here, but before I do that, I want to talk a little bit about this government, particularly the government's backbench. I'd like to begin with that, because I have to say something. I think you have a really tough job and I think you have a tougher job than we do, because we can come day in and day out with a clear conscience and oppose bad decisions, and you've got to go along with them. The thing is, it's not easy for you. It can't be easy for you; it really can't.

I see, sometimes, during question period when we put out a question to this side, and people are literally struck on the government side with an epiphany. They're just sitting in their chair reeling sometimes. They're having a crisis of conscience. They can't believe that this is what their government and this is what their ministers are up to. They just can't. They put their names in hoping to have a hand in change for the province of Ontario, bringing their own philosophies to bear, whatever it is, and they come here day in and day out and sit absolutely powerless—powerless to leave a mark, to leave a legacy, to do absolutely anything. All they can do is sit there and take it. That's all they can do on a day-to-day basis.

Now, I think it's better to not call them backbenchers; it would probably be better to refer to them as parliamentary assistants, because this is probably the government, per capita, that has had the highest number. For that, I congratulate you. That gives you an opportunity to be nearer to decision-making. But I think this is what you quickly found out: It doesn't matter that you're a parliamentary assistant; you don't get to make a decision. You are a parliamentary assistant because it is a means of control. Because when you are faced with having to rubber-stamp bad decisions, all you've got staring you in the face to keep you in line is the brand that they could threaten to take from you and a PA-ship, and yet you still do it. You may not want to admit it now. You may not want to admit it now, but maybe at 2 a.m. when you're going to get milk out of the fridge because you can't sleep, you'll think about it then, and if you don't think about it now, you'll think about it soon.

1500

One of the things I've always noticed about these same members is I think they're terrific people. I really, really like many of the members on the government side. I talk to them in the halls all the time. I talk to them outside of the chamber. One thing I never, never truly understood was how it is that a group of individuals like these—principled, good, who want to make change—end up making decisions like the ones that we face here in the province day in and day out.

And then you go to the next level: the ministers. I'm going to get into that as I discuss one of the schedules in this bill. Do the ministers make decisions? Are the opinions of the ministers actually respected? I would say no. I would say, for the most part, no. You get all the way

up to the highest levels, to leadership itself, and I think that the decisions don't even come from there, because at the highest level of this pyramid of power exists, on the shoulders of power, one side that's a PR guy, and the on the other side it's special interest.

An example of that is the bill we were debating earlier, the Keeping Energy Costs Down Act—another fun title, because it's actually doing the opposite. In that case it was Enbridge. A decision was made and within 15 hours of the decision, somewhere intermediary someone high up in Enbridge—maybe its \$19-million CEO—called out, reached to someone high up in this government and said, "This is completely irresponsible. Don't allow this." Now, their own investors didn't want it, but they said they would pass that on to customers. And this government rubber-stamped it. This government came out within 15 hours. You have individuals of all stripes, people fighting so many different things, and they could never get even a phone call across to a member that could make a decision in this government. But the people with power always, always do.

So what are we getting done here? Environmental Assessment Act, schedule 1: Based on some of the conversations that I've heard, an EA is just nothing more than an impediment. As I had said before, it was Conservatives of the past that established conservation authorities in this province. The Conservatives of the past have legacies. In fact, the public energy system, hydro, was delivered by Conservatives, and they said it should be at-cost. How far has this government fallen? How is it described that EAs are essentially an impediment? This government has no interest in quality control. What they want to do is now presuppose decisions and say, "Go along. Do whatever you want. Forget an EA. We don't care about them anyway. They're just really a hassle." They're not something that this government is interested in. But you know there are cases where people will purchase newly built condos, homes and other things before the developers even purchase lands. They will put that out for sale, and guess what? The project doesn't get through. And who is left holding the bag? Consumers. There are reasons why you can't put the cart before the horse, but the government doesn't want to hear it.

I want to move on to schedule 4, the Photo Card Act. What this one reminds me of are licence plates in this province. Licence plates trigger for me what this government has been, which has been an entire month of wasted time going back and backtracking on bad decisions they made.

Now, again, government backbenchers, I don't blame you individually for this, because none of you had any choice in any of these decisions. Someone high up at the top will come up with something that you have no control over, and it makes its way down, and then you're told with a piece of paper, "This is what you're doing. This is how you're going to vote. No opinion on your part is necessary. Just do what you're told." And so you do.

But this government has done nothing but backtrack over and over and over again. And so I would say when

you actually look at a portion of this here—this should not be called the Get It Done Act; it should be called the “get it undone act,” because there’s a portion in here that the government did around regional boundaries where they did it and then they undid it, and then in this they’re undoing what they undid. But that’s only a little bit of what they have undone.

There is actually a long list of what they’ve undone. The wage cap law—and this comes from the Canadian Press. Bill 124 capped salary increases. What did they have to do? They had to get it undone because it was ruled unconstitutional. And what did that bill do? It further damaged health care in this province. It directly damaged health care in this province. And how did it do that? Well, I’m going to let you in on a little bit of Tory math.

As we all know, we have long waiting lists when it comes to surgeries or getting treatment in hospitals and other places, when it comes to health care. But this government, above all, wants to privatize health care in the province of Ontario. They can’t say it openly because—remember how I told you that at the height of leadership, there’s a PR guy and then there are special interests on this side? The PR guy knows that Ontarians take pride in the public health care system; that this government doesn’t. They will find ways to destroy it, and one way is through planned obsolescence. How do they do that? Well, nurses and nursing agencies. They’ve done reports on this. The Auditor General has reported on this. It has been reported widely in the media. In southern Ontario, in some places, by up to 25 times more than the past, hospitals are having to rely on nursing agencies to bring in nurses. Why? Because our nurses are burnt out, they’re not respected, and they’re not paid what they deserve. So at a cost of something like \$35 to \$50 an hour for one of these hospital nurses, at the current rates, this government allows these hospitals, or pushes them, even, to go to agencies, to pay over \$100 an hour—double. And of that \$100, a quarter of it goes to an agency, it goes to their administration, it goes to profits; it’s not going to health care.

Nurses are leaving public jobs to go into those ones that you’re helping create. In fact, it was the spouse of a former Tory Premier who got into that business a long time ago. So what’s happening is this: For the cost of two nurses at the current rates, you’re getting one nurse through an agency—a nurse who is going to a new hospital, learning the place, at many times. Patients are there, and they’re seeing a different nurse every single day.

Our current nurses are burnt out and disrespected. And what is this government doing? They’re making the situation absolutely worse. Do you know why? Because when they go into private industry and that money from the government goes into more private pockets, where do you think that money goes? It goes from the taxpayer into a Conservative bank account. That’s what it does. It’s the circle of life for the Tories. That’s all that happens here.

They had to repeal Bill 124 because the courts made them. The dissolution of Peel: Guess what? They had to undo that too. They came in here—they’ve had no respect for municipal boundaries in many different ways—tore it

up, and there it is; official plans, again, regional boundaries, the greenbelt.

Do ministers have control? Here’s where I get to that point. I would say no. And I think the greenbelt scandal showed that, because you can’t have it both ways.

This government, during an election, said time and time again, “We’re not going to open up the greenbelt.” They tried to open it again, and then, when they couldn’t do it, they weaken conservation authorities, they tear up EA processes, they do everything they can until eventually—remember the special interests I told you about sitting, on this shoulder? The special interests said, “Don’t listen to the PR guy.” He reached across, put his hand over the mouth of the PR guy and said, “Just do it. It’s where the money comes from.” Right? “What are we paying you for?” And so, what they did was they tore up the greenbelt.

At the time, the minister had to face question after question after question, and with a sweaty face—in fact, his documents damp from the sweat—he had to sit up here and defend decisions until he had said, “I had nothing to do with that.” How do you have it both ways?

So was the minister making these decisions or was he not? And then he ended up losing his job as minister. So if he didn’t make the decisions, why is he not in the chair? He did nothing wrong.

1510

Well, whatever they did with the greenbelt led to the RCMP investigating this government. Again, I go back to what I said: I have tremendous respect for the backbench and the PAs and the ministers of this government. They had nothing to do with these decisions. They’ve got to wear them day, in and day out.

Imagine how embarrassing it is for a government that prides itself on being all about law and order to be investigated by the RCMP. It is nothing short of an embarrassment. And the government members feel that embarrassment. When we asked questions at the time, I remember standing beside—

Hon. Stan Cho: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I recognize the member from Willowdale on a point of order.

Hon. Stan Cho: It’s been happening the whole debate, but I think comments should be made through the Chair. It’s just that it’s been about 12 minutes of that, so thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Thank you. Comments should always be made through the Chair.

I turn back the member from Humber River–Black Creek

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you to the minister for that. I’m just trying to commiserate with the government. The reality is, I’m telling them, Speaker, individually that it’s not their fault, because they had nothing to do with the decision-making process. Because they never do—they never do.

So was it this government? Was it a minister? Do they have power or not? Well, we’re going to find out as the RCMP continue this investigation on who knew what. But

these are exactly the issues that we're facing from this government. They're not accountable to the people because the people making the decisions claim they have a mandate. It's not them. It's not the people that put their names forward, fighting to make change for their community, who get to make any decisions here. It's PR guys and special interests. That's it.

Now, the "notwithstanding" clause: Again, this is a measure that is supposed to be brought in, I mean, literally, under extreme circumstances. Well, these guys are using it to change toilet paper in the bathroom—for anything. It doesn't matter. Do you know why? Because if they can't get their way, they will break it out.

And you don't know the amount of flack they got for that. And I was getting flack on their behalf, people calling and saying, "I can't believe this is even happening." They thought this is inside baseball; nobody is going to know. Do you know many lawyers and judges were rolling their eyes at the abuse of this government with regard to the "notwithstanding" clause?

The licence plates—I'm going to get into it again. What an embarrassment, right? Vanity plates that can't be read. They can't be seen in bad weather. They can't be seen at night. They can't be seen in the sun. Get it undone. Then they announced a plan to do nothing about it. That was the plan: Don't do anything.

One of the first times this government had to backtrack was on the autism file. They won't listen to the advocates—autism advocates. They'll pick up the phone call from Enbridge. So they came in here and they made changes, and families and individuals were out by the hundreds, if not the thousands, on the front lawn, and they had to again get undone the damage they did to the system.

Public health, e-learning, class sizes: I mean, the pandemic taught us how successful remote learning can be in some of these cases. But these were things that they all talked about. A French university—they lost a member over this. They took aim at French-speaking people in Ontario. And then they had to go back on it.

Legal aid: Tear that up too, right? Imagine, at a time where they want to talk about law and order, and there are victims of crime, they don't even want to support them. It goes on and on and on.

And in the time I have left, I won't be able to get into schedule 5 much. I already talked about Enbridge, how Enbridge called them up and said, "Guys, we're paying you. We want to charge customers. It's not going to come out of our bottom line. It's not going to come out of our profits." Well, guess what this government did? They passed it—

Hon. Stan Cho: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I recognize the member from Willowdale on a point of order.

Hon. Stan Cho: I want to let the member continue, but pursuant to standing order 25(b)(i)—through you, Speaker—the member has not been on the topic of the bill we are debating pretty much at all. So I ask that the member return to the subject matter of the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I will ask the member from Humber River–Black Creek to stay close to and on the topic as much as possible.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you so much, Speaker. I see I've ruffled feathers, and that's not my intention, seriously. I'm here to commiserate with them. I've said it many times: It's not their fault, individually. It's the PR guy and the special interests. They just need to stand up to them.

But I'll get on to the final thing, in the minute left: schedule 6. And there's not much time. The 407, highway tolls—the only time tolls have ever been collected on the 412 and the 418 was by this government. So they're removing tolls from highways that in other cases don't have tolls, and then in other cases, the 407, which under the past leadership—and I won't blame them individually—allowed the cost of the tolls on the 407 to balloon to the highest-cost toll highway in the visible universe. That's what we're facing. Do something about it.

In the 30 seconds left: They had an opportunity in the last session of government, a billion dollars that the 407 owed the people because they breached their own contract. They did not reach the level of cars that they were supposed to. This government could have taken them to the cleaners and said, "You owe us a billion dollars." Do you know what the government did—why? Because the 407 sits right here on that shoulder of special interest. They said, "Keep the money. The people of Ontario don't need a billion dollars; you have it. Make more money on the backs of Ontarians." That's what this government's been all about.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Questions?

Hon. Rob Flack: That was quite a performance, and congratulations. I find it incredulous that you would sit there and scold us on how we do our jobs. Take a look at the disarray, take a look at the organization, take a look at your own backyard, and then talk to us. Get your own house in order.

Speaker, we have cut taxes in this government—cut taxes. We have grown our economy. We've created an environment to see \$50 billion more come into our treasury. How many fees, how many taxes—what would you do on the backs of Ontario people to make their life more unaffordable?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: More ruffled feathers. Do you know what we wouldn't do? What you did this week. In the midst of an affordability crisis, put more costs on the backs of people paying for gas to heat their homes in the way they did—because when Enbridge came to them, that special interest giant, and said to this government, "We don't want to pay out of our profits. Make the consumers pay more on their bills," what did this government say? "Yes, sir, anything you want." Because money talks when it comes to this government but only the money that comes from big interests. And they hate hearing that. They hate it. Sorry to have to say it.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Order. The Associate Minister of Housing will come to order.

Next question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Again, thank you to the member from Humber River–Black Creek. That was a master class, and I appreciate—you in our caucus, really, are a very well-respected member of our caucus, and now you can see why.

My question—really, I want to focus on—and you said it: the idea of who is on the shoulders, the big shoulders of the top leadership in this House. My question to you is, did this come to your mind when the Premier said that what Ontarians need, what legislators need is a lesson in sales and marketing?

It seemed to me that then I understood that this is not a Premier that wants to govern; this is a Premier that thinks that being the Premier is about sales and it's about marketing. I would say that speaks directly to what you're saying, that this isn't about good governance. It isn't about governing wisely and well. It's about selling, and it's about marketing. The title of this bill says that exactly.

1520

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for that question. It's astounding to me that after 20 minutes of me commiserating with the government side, actually not blaming them for bad decision-making individually, and saying collectively that the decisions are made somewhere high up by a PR guy and by special interests, they get their feathers ruffled instead of saying, "Yeah, you're right. You're right. It really sucks."

But that's exactly what the reality is of this. They may not want to admit it today, but they know—they know—what I'm saying is true. They absolutely know that what I'm saying is true. They're just too scared to say it themselves.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question.

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for his comments. Chair of the public accounts committee—and I won't be on the committee anymore; as a result, it'll run much more efficiently going forward than it did before.

I was very interested in the member's detailed description of what it's like being in government, and I was taking notes. It was very effective description of the government. Then, I realized, wait a minute, he's not in government—and may never be. But I want to react to the comment about being powerless, because it got me thinking about what we've done here—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Snark. Snarky snark. Lack of substance.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Order.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Here is what we've done. Infrastructure: \$70 billion in transit, \$185 billion overall; jobs: 700,000 jobs in this mandate; nurses, comment on nurses, we've hired 17,000 last year; on, on and on. Far from powerless, Madam Speaker. I think that's a very powerful agenda that all of us on this side of the House are proud to be a part of. Wouldn't you agree and therefore want to support the bill?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: First of all, thank you for the kind comments. We'll miss you on committee, and it was a pleasure serving with you there.

Health care Tory math: You want to talk about numbers? You? Under this government, hospitals are being forced to pay double the amount to hire agency nurses than have their own nurses. At the same cost, they could be doubling the amount of nurses in our hospitals. These are things not to be proud of: escalating costs of everything, an affordability crisis, skyrocketing costs of literally everything under this government; claiming that they're going to fight a housing crisis, and all they're doing is making land speculators rich while people struggle, while workers struggle. How is this something to be proud of?

But again, I don't blame the member, because it wasn't him. It was the people making the decisions that they're all forced to have to walk in line with and follow. I get it: It ruffles feathers—ruffles feathers to know that you made it to government and you've got no power, individually. That's why I commiserate with them, and I wish that they would stand up to their leadership and have an opinion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): Next question.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the member for your comments and your entertaining speech today. It was really, really good.

One of the things that you were talking about—you know, there's that cycle of life. You were talking about the cycle of money and how that works, that the cycle of money is from taxpayers to special-interest groups into Conservative coffers through donations. Can you expand on that? Where are you seeing all this cycle of money so that we, as taxpayers, are putting in all kinds of money that gets diverted to these private for-profit corporations, and then back into Conservative coffers so that they can use that money to get re-elected and continue the cycle?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes, money drives the Conservatives; I'll tell you that. And it is the Tory's cycle of life. You basically take power. You privatize; Tory governments privatize. They create entire new sectors and industries that are really happy because you've now given them the ability to reap massive profits and deliver less on the backs of Ontarians. Then they themselves invest in those industries, and then those same industries that have now become fabulously rich, turn around, take some of that money and give it back to the Conservatives to do more of that destruction and spiralling damage to this province. That becomes the legacy. It is something to which I wish this government members would in caucus say, "Enough is enough is enough," because Ontarians have had enough.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): The next question: the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you, Madam Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche): I'm sorry. Are you sitting in the correct chair? Yes. Please go ahead.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I am in the correct seat.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche): I apologize. I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To my colleague opposite, my neighbour in the adjoining riding: To me, it's so obvious. It's economics 101. When you cut taxes and you lay the groundwork for businesses to thrive, they grow; they hire. The new employees pay taxes. When you have new people paying taxes, you have an economy that is growing. This is exactly what history has shown.

I want to ask my friend: Do you not agree that the seeds to success lie in a prudent social economy that is based on keeping the regulations and the taxes as low as possible to encourage people to come here and start a business and hire people, and that's how you grow an economy?

Mr. Tom Rakovevic: First of all, I have a lot of respect for the member. He is my neighbour. We sat shoulder to shoulder at a safety meeting in my very own community the other day, and I appreciate his presence there.

I was called out by a government member saying that I wasn't sticking to the topic. I'm not really sure how that comes into play about the current bill or even what I was saying. Respectfully, I was talking most recently about the privatization that this government is wreaking on health care and what the effect is, that it is bad Tory math, that they take spots—instead of paying nurses and respecting them so that they stay in hospitals, they stay in their long-term jobs, private agencies are coming in. We're paying double the cost. A quarter of that at least goes into administration—their profits. This is our taxpayer money. Health care is spiralling out of control. They're making rich friends and donors richer and richer and richer. That money, as the Tory cycle of life, comes back into their coffers.

This has to stop. I hope these members of this government in caucus somewhere get the ministers aside. Shake them. Tell them, "Stand up to the leaders. Stand up to the special interests and the PR guy and do what's in your heart. Do what's in your conscience." Because I know a lot of you are not happy.

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

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Sorry. Restart the clock.

I recognize the member for Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: First, I want to thank the minister, who rolled back the changes of our official plan, changes that were done in haste and without consultation last November because they got it done wrong. I acknowledge that when you get it done wrong, you fix those mistakes. This is a wise choice because the decision was made in haste. It caused confusion and shock in my community and undermined local government. I felt this as a city councillor and as someone who was part of the planning process.

Our planning process that we embarked on included the voices of municipality leaders, community leaders, experts, citizens, stakeholders, environmental groups etc., to ensure that we allotted the right amount of land to meet the housing targets we had for decades to come but also were mindful of our forests, our farms and our wetlands, taking only what we need. Our community is dependent on groundwater, one of the few communities in Ontario that uses solely groundwater for our drinking etc.

Unfortunately, the ministry has got it done wrong again, and we continue to waste time and money from cash-strapped municipalities, undermining our local farming economy. Lands were added to our regional official plan 6. Our process used expert data, and we were concerned about impact. This recent addition of hundreds if not thousands of hectares of land does not use good process. Even the province's own housing task force clearly stated, "Land is available, both inside the ... built-up areas and on undeveloped land outside greenbelts...."

"Greenbelts and other environmentally sensitive areas must be protected." Farms that "provide food and food security" need to be protected. "Relying too heavily on undeveloped land would whittle away too much the already small share of land devoted to agriculture."

Speaker, this government continues to get it done wrong by doubling down on a flawed process to pursue a sprawl agenda which only benefits wealthy developers.

1530

Former mayor of Toronto and cabinet minister David Crombie said, "The last thing Ontarians need in a housing crisis is a new law that supports building the wrong" kind "of housing in the wrong places at the wrong prices"—his words.

Speculators in my area—our area—are having a field day. They are buying up all the farmland on the countryside line and sitting on it so they can cash in big when the winds turn their way, which has been happening. Our own Waterloo Federation of Agriculture said and protections are now permeable, and our farmers are leaving the province. This flip-flopping is costing our \$47-billion farming economy that supplies more than 750,000 jobs. It's costing us the next generation of farmers. It's also costing us a livable planet for my kids and our children by doubling down on a way of life that leads to soul-crushing commutes and financially unfeasible municipal costs.

Speaker, I call on the minister to reinstate the regional official plan 6 for the region of Waterloo, to respect our thorough and world-class process, the community, the money that we spent, the time and love we put into it to honour the clean water and air that sustain my children and all of our children.

I'm ready for questions.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Thank you to my colleague for her remarks. I officially welcome her to the House—I know I've welcomed you earlier, but officially now that I have the floor.

I know the official plan changes the member from Kitchener Centre referenced are being made after careful consultations with the affected municipalities. This is what they requested, and I know the member, from her time on Kitchener city council, will understand that process very well.

She spoke of agriculture. Obviously, as she knows, my riding has a lot of agriculture in it. I know she hasn't had the opportunity yet to vote on a budget bill, but in the last budget, we invested a lot in agriculture and supporting our farmers. We have a Grow Ontario Strategy. Will she support us in calling on the federal government to remove the carbon tax, which the OFA calls for?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I think farmers also recognize that climate change impacts them more than anything else. And I will say that the oil and gas companies take 18 cents a litre in pure profits, and that's more important than money people get back in their pockets.

But what I'll say is the process that they went through in this way is asking cities to bite the hand that feeds them. It was not a fulsome process. We had a world-class process that led to this result. It was democratic. It involved all levels of government. But instead, we're cherry-picking municipalities and asking them to push back on a PC government that actually holds the purse strings to the very funds that they rely on. It is biased and problematic at best.

I know from my city council—I'm not an expert planner; I never was, and I never claimed to be. I relied on experts in my community to make my decisions. So, to me, to abandon a world-class process was getting it done wrong.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the comments from the member for Kitchener Centre about the concerns that her community has raised over the changes to the official plan. I'm curious to know, as a new member of this House, what her opinion is on a process that sees the government bring forward MZOs without community consent, then brings in legislation to reverse all those MZOs, and then brings in new legislation to un-reverse some of those MZOs. Does the minister think that that is a good use of the legislative time that we have available to us in this chamber? Does it address the real concerns of the people of this province?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I was taught, "Measure twice, cut once." Weren't we all? Raise your hands if you've heard that—I don't know if you're allowed to do that here. But yes, "Measure twice, cut once." We keep cutting before we measure at all.

Thank you to the member from London West. What I've experienced, and I know from my municipalities, we have had to hire so many additional planning staff in order to meet the expectations of this government. Meanwhile, most of our funding is being cut. We aren't getting the same funding from our developers. Our city has always said, "Growth pays for growth." That's not the reality anymore; instead, we keep doubling down, downloading more and more responsibilities, and less and less money,

onto municipalities. Do you know what that leads to? Property tax hikes.

So, in a time of unaffordability, we are coercing our local municipalities to raise property taxes, which is really not helpful, and that's as a result of the flip-flopping.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): We have time for one further question.

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I was listening to the member quite closely and I just wanted to ask her: She talks about municipalities, and I agree with her—of course they are frustrated, and we hear that frustration, too, which is why we're helping municipalities so much, because they had such a shortfall in infrastructure funding for the last 15 years under the Liberals—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I ask her, with our infrastructure funding that we're investing and all the transit investment—we're uploading things like the Gardiner and other things and getting rid of tolls. Would she support that, which includes more transit options?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I do acknowledge the funding in transit. I'm deeply grateful.

One thing that is not good bang for your buck is new highways like the 413. This is something that will balloon out of control. It will cost billions and billions and billions of dollars to save people 30 seconds. Meanwhile, we need two-way, all-day GO in our area. We need an LRT to—

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

Further debate?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I first just want to say good afternoon to everyone in the House. It really is my pleasure to rise today to speak in strong support of Bill 162, the Get It Done Act. If passed, Speaker, this legislation will drive economic growth by keeping costs down for individuals and small businesses across our province, including many in my riding of Mississauga–Streetsville.

I do want to start by thanking our hard-working Premier, Doug Ford, and our Minister of Transportation, Prab Sarkaria, for their leadership in introducing this very important bill. From lower taxes to improved infrastructure, our government is laser-focused on making life more affordable and creating good jobs. With Bill 162, we are taking significant steps towards getting more shovels in the ground faster and delivering on our promise to get it done.

Speaker, the most important issue I hear from so many small businesses is the unfair effect the carbon tax has on their day-to-day operations. That is why I am so happy to say that this vital legislation our government will introduce will help protect people from the high cost of a provincial carbon tax. Carbon pricing puts an extra financial burden on households and businesses through higher prices on everyday goods. That's why we're bringing in a bill that, if passed, would give voters a direct say over any future provincial carbon tax, cap-and-trade system or other pricing program.

This proposed legislation would strengthen affordability by requiring any government to obtain consent

through a referendum before imposing a new carbon pricing scheme. Speaker, this builds on steps we've already taken through the Taxpayer Protection Act to safeguard people from unexpected tax hikes. Our focus as a government remains to keep costs down for Ontarians as they battle rising inflation.

The potential for any added provincial carbon tax is unacceptable, so we continue to urge Ottawa to immediately return the \$1.3 billion it collected and set aside for Ontario businesses over the past five years and eliminate the federal carbon tax entirely. According to the CFIB, the average small business would have received about \$1,245, but now, because of the changes Ottawa has made, that amount has been reduced by more than half. With families and job creators feeling the pinch like never before, protecting small businesses must be a top priority. That's why we must lock in accountability and prevent a backdoor carbon tax from sneaking past voters.

1540

The people of Ontario deserve to have a say over what comes out of their wallets and that is precisely what Ontario families expect from us.

Speaker, we were elected to keep more money in people's pockets. This proposed legislation honours that commitment and guarantees transparency over any scheme that hits wallets with a punitive price on carbon.

We do recognize that more money in consumers' pockets means more money going back into small businesses in all our local communities, and more money to help families pay for food, heat and necessities.

A carbon tax only punishes entrepreneurs and families through higher operating costs on everyday essentials like energy. Any added provincial carbon tax would push many over the edge, as they are already struggling with inflation. It would be yet another burden, with its increasing costs passed down through higher prices at the pump, energy bills, and everyday goods. For small businesses, this chips away at their competitiveness. Every dollar lost to carbon tax is a dollar that can't be reinvested back into their businesses.

Our proposed legislation is about defending small businesses and families just trying to make ends meet.

Operational costs, especially for energy-intensive industries, need stability, not unpredictable price hikes from new carbon taxes. Many business owners I've spoken to simply can't absorb carbon taxes on top of other cost pressures. Some have shared fears that they may need to scale back or, sadly, even close their shop as a result. That's not a risk we can take lightly when small businesses employ so many in communities across Ontario.

That's why we're ensuring voters have a say on carbon pricing. We cannot idly watch as carbon pricing threatens the very livelihoods of business owners who power our economy. The last thing they need is a carbon tax increasing their electricity bills and fuel expenses. That money would come out of hiring or capital investments.

Our proposed legislation will protect both individuals and job creators. So I do hope, on that basis, all members will be supportive.

Speaker, as the Associate Minister of Small Business and MPP for Mississauga–Streetsville, I know too well the challenges our entrepreneurs face. High costs are a major barrier that can prevent smaller companies from reaching their full potential. That's why our government is laser-focused on creating the right conditions to success. We've worked hard to lower taxes and reduce costs significantly for job creators. Just last year alone, we saved small businesses over \$3.6 billion through our efforts. This is money our entrepreneurs can re-invest to expand operations, hire more staff and fuel economic growth.

With families and businesses feeling the impact of high inflation and interest rates, we must act. That's why I am so proud that this legislation includes measures to ban new highway tolls across our province. For too long, tolls have acted as an unnecessary tax on commuters and commercial vehicles alike. By prohibiting future tolls, we're helping drivers in Mississauga and across Ontario keep hundreds of dollars in their pockets each year—money that can instead be spent at local shops and restaurants.

Speaker, this bill will also make the freeze on driver's licence fees permanent, through our legislation. For the average Mississauga resident, this ongoing freeze translates to real savings that will add to the numerous ways our government is making life more affordable.

With the cost of living higher than ever, our government is doing everything possible to make life more affordable.

Another crucial part of Bill 162 is designating the Hazel McCallion light rail transit extensions to downtown Mississauga and Brampton as priority transit projects. As the MPP for Mississauga–Streetsville, I could not be more supportive of fast-tracking these critical investments. Our aging infrastructure can no longer keep up with the growth that we need to see in Mississauga. As it stands, severe congestion on our roads is costing the average driver in our city over 30 minutes per day, and this leads to lost productivity for our job creators and mounting frustration for commuters.

The new LRT extensions will provide for a faster, more reliable transportation option to boost mobility and economic opportunity across south Peel. And by streamlining the approval process, these vital projects can break ground that much sooner. Transit options like the LRT have overwhelmingly positive impacts on attracting and retaining talent in Mississauga, like our growing workforce, which in turn allows businesses to scale up their operations and create more local jobs.

Speaker, as the Associate Minister of Small Business, I am delighted to see changes to streamline mine permitting processes across the province in this bill. Small businesses in the mining sector are the backbone of many northern and rural economies, and the lifeblood of communities that rely on the resources that they produce. However, long application timelines were a challenge for many exploration and smaller mining companies seeking permits and approvals. That's why our government took action by implementing the Mining Act modernization in 2019.

The current multi-year process for approving new mining projects hinders growth for many small businesses

that operate in our thriving mineral resources sector. From mining supply and service companies to local shops and restaurants, these job creators depend on a healthy industry to run their operations. Streamlining rules will drive greater investment and productivity right across Ontario. By cutting unnecessary layers of bureaucracy and overlapping requirements between ministries, we can welcome more mining projects faster while maintaining the highest environmental standards. This would provide small businesses involved in the sector with greater confidence to hire staff and invest in expansion, knowing demand from mining clients is more predictable and timelier.

For rural and Indigenous businesses in particular, economic spinoffs from an accelerated permitting system could truly be transformative. We must also reduce the burden placed on Indigenous communities through the current permit-by-permit approach. Coordinating engagement on a project would address consultation fatigue and support business relationships between mining companies and First Nation suppliers. Getting resource developments approved in a timely yet thoroughly responsible manner will fuel economic prosperity across multiple regions, all the way from mines in Timmins to the tech companies that use those minerals to make computer chips in southern Ontario.

Speaker, the proposed changes mean more sustainable growth and good jobs in communities that depend on our thriving natural resource sector and the small businesses that support them. Our government is committed to reducing barriers for job creators of all sizes in all sectors. With a streamlined mining permitting system, we will create exciting new opportunities for small businesses all over Ontario.

I know several of the opposition members have constituents who earn their living in the natural resource sector, so I do hope they support these proposals that promise widespread economic benefits for many, many years to come.

On top of that, Speaker, the transit priorities in Bill 162 contain amendments to speed up key infrastructure like highways, rail lines and power grids through environmental assessment reforms. While maintaining our strong oversight and protections, these targeted changes could shave years off project timelines, and that means less time spent tangled in red tape and more time spent building.

Expediting processes, as this bill proposes, will help infrastructure dollars go further, building more roads, more hospitals, more schools and other necessities with the same public funding. And if these projects can be completed sooner, the economic spinoffs will also be returned to the communities more quickly through jobs and new business opportunities.

In Mississauga, getting shovels in the ground faster on priorities like Highway 413 could not be more critical. These proposed expressways will slash commute times for our residents by up to 30 minutes each way on some of the busiest corridors in North America. That's an hour back in the day for working parents or an hour gained for a local small business to serve customers better. With a

population projected to grow by one million people in the next decade, Ontario desperately needs new road infrastructure simply to avoid gridlock.

1550

By fast-tracking responsible development, Bill 162 will help ensure Mississauga and the rest of the GTA have the highways, the transit and logistics networks required to support sustainable growth well into the future. And Speaker, of course, none of these benefits matter if we cannot build more housing to meet sky-high demand.

That's why I'm so thrilled to see this legislation support streamlining municipal planning approvals. For too long, tedious red tape at the local level has constrained new development. If we want young families to call Mississauga home, or businesses to set up shop, having an adequate supply of housing options is a must.

With the proposed changes, our municipal partners right across the GTHA will be better equipped to modify this quickly and get much-needed projects off the drawing board. Residents will see results faster, from new waste water treatment plants to community centres, as municipalities gain more control over their destinies. Meanwhile, our small business community will have an expanded customer base as our population grows responsibly.

Speaker, I urge all members of this House to vote yes on Bill 162 and, if passed, this forward-thinking legislation will drive investment, attract top talent and build the modern infrastructure our growing communities require, accelerating Ontario's economic recovery. Streamlining processes while maintaining strong environmental protection strikes the right balance. With a common-sense, efficient approach like this, we can get critical projects done on schedule and on budget. Most importantly, we can deliver for the hard-working people of Mississauga and all of Ontario who just simply want to get ahead in life.

This legislation is about unleashing job creation, revitalizing our municipalities and affirming our government's unwavering commitment to get it done. Bill 162 will move key projects off the drawing board and into construction, and that means more opportunities for every one of all of our constituents in this House and a brighter economic future we can all be proud of.

Speaker, in closing, let's all get it done for the people of Ontario.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Today, we are debating Bill 162, the Get It Done bill.

So in the vein of getting it done, I just want to give some acknowledgement and a shout-out to some of my colleagues, my colleague from Humber River-Black Creek, my colleague from Hamilton Mountain and my colleague from Nickel Belt because, today, in the province of Ontario, is the first day that the ban on celebrities and athletes being used in gambling ads for online gaming that this government brought in with no regulations or plans around that. So, in the vein of getting it done, I would like to say to my fellow MPP colleagues, congratulations on pushing so hard along with so many vulnerable people in

our communities to actually get the ban on celebrities and athletes to be enacted.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I want to thank the member from Windsor West. However, that question really didn't pertain to this bill. However—

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: So get it done.

Hon. Nina Tangri: This is a government that is getting it done. We're getting it done, not just for the people in the GTHA, we're getting it done for the people right across this province. Not only that, we're taking a leadership role right across this country, because that's what we need: We need a government that has the backs of the people of this province, we need a government that makes sure that we get the infrastructure built so that our communities can grow, we need a government that makes sure that our children and their children and their children will have a home that they can live in. Unfortunately, the opposition are always voting against the proposals that we have to get shovels in the ground. Here is a great example for us to make sure our communities grow.

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

Mr. John Jordan: There have been a number of motions passed in this House relative to the carbon tax: to remove the carbon tax on the transportation of goods, to remove the carbon tax on food production at our farms, to remove the carbon tax on home heating.

Can the member please tell me how this bill will continue to work towards and protect consumers against future carbon taxes?

Hon. Nina Tangri: I really do want to thank my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, because, working with him over the last two years, I've seen first-hand how he really stands up for his constituents and how hard he has worked to make sure that we, as a government, can try to make life more affordable for the people in all of our communities.

One way to do that is calling on our federal government to remove the carbon tax off everything; however, we are going to do our part. What is in our control is to make sure that no future governments can add a carbon tax or carbon pricing or cap-and-trade—whatever they want to call it—without holding a referendum first. Let the people of this province speak. The people of this province did speak last year when they brought back our government with a bigger majority, because they wanted us to get it done and to make life more affordable for the people of this province.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's the first time I stand up today. I just wanted to say on the carbon tax, it was your government that brought in the carbon tax; we supported cap-and-trade. You should at least tell the citizens of Ontario the truth, and you should tell the truth about the tolls in schedule 6. We know that you privatized and sold off Highway 407, but the east part of the 407 is owned by your government, and just the other day, Durham—where you have a number of MPPs—voted asking your

government to take the tolls off Durham and that 407 east, which you're in charge of.

My question to you: Are you going to support the residents of Durham and take the tolls off the 407 east, which you could do today?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the member for the question, because it is important. This is our great step in making sure that no future highways have tolls on them. It is so important that we build infrastructure so our newcomers can get to and from work and so that our goods can get to where they need to go to make life more affordable. We desperately need a system—they're against highways, they're against roads, they're against transit, they're against everything. But this is the government that's making sure we're going to build that infrastructure that we desperately need without having tolls on any more of our future highways.

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

Mr. Ric Bresee: I really appreciated the minister's comments for this debate. She was speaking about the mining industry and how this bill will actually help to move that forward. Leaning into her own experience as the Associate Minister of Small Business, I would like her to talk more about the multiplier effect; how all of those small businesses, which are the vast majority of businesses in this province, will continue to thrive and continue to build the revenues for this province like has never been seen before.

Hon. Nina Tangri: First, I really want to thank the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington. We've worked so hard in our government—I've actually been up to Timmins numerous times, I've seen the mines, I've seen the great work that they do up there and how the communities depend on those mines and the production that they have there. The previous government, they had so much instability that people left, they chose not to invest here. But there has been a massive change since our government came into power. Not only are Timmins and Sudbury and many other areas of this province growing; they're growing exponentially, and because of that, all of the offshoot small businesses, all of the local mom-and-pop shops, the suppliers—everyone else is making communities thrive. Wherever we have the mining and other areas with great industries, with that come the offshoots of the small businesses and all those great people who supply goods to them, the food—you name it. It's absolutely wonderful when you see those communities able to get shovels in the ground, able to mine, able to shore, and able to do the great work that the people who want to do it can do.

1600

So I'm excited about this bill. When it's passed, it's really going to make sure that those communities like Timmins continue to grow and continue to thrive.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would just like to say that this government needs to acknowledge that you have—and

this, believe me, comes from the Fraser Institute: This government has the highest combined debt per person—actually, the second highest. Newfoundland is the only province that has a higher combined debt than Ontario. So while you put out all these numbers and say that you are going to save people money—you're not.

In fact, the biggest expenditure of this government is interest payments on the debt. The debt has ballooned under this government at the same time as you're underfunding—you have the lowest per capita spending on the things that people need, like hospitals and like education. So how does this square up? How can you have a huge debt and deficit but you're not spending enough money and you're saving people taxpayer dollars? No. They have to pay the taxes on the debt that you have accumulated.

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you to the member from Hamilton West, because it really allows us to highlight some of the work that we've been doing. It's actually quite interesting, because there's not a tax that they don't like—there's not something that they don't want to add cost to people. But it's this government that has been saving money, whether it's saving money on the per-litre of gas—10.7 cents. We've been doing that.

Also, this government is making record investments. Yes, we are spending money, because we need more hospitals, we need more schools. We're building the Ontario Line. We're building the Hazel McCallion LRT. We're building infrastructure right across this province. We are going to get the Ring of Fire built. This government is going to invest in the facilities and the infrastructure that we desperately need, and we're not going to apologize for that. Actually, we're proud of that fact—that we are able to invest in our communities, in our businesses, in everyone who wants to come to Ontario because we are the best place to live, to work, to raise a family, to invest, and to own a business.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm going to ask for the indulgence of the members in the House today. I haven't had an opportunity to address Ed Broadbent's passing. I'd like to take a moment at the beginning of my speech here to talk about Ed Broadbent.

I'm from Oshawa. I grew up in Oshawa. My father worked at General Motors, and my brother works there now. My grandfather, great-grandfather—everybody worked at General Motors. Ed Broadbent was also from Oshawa. His father and his uncles and other family members also worked at General Motors. My father worked with his uncles in the tool and die department in the north plant at General Motors. My best friend's mother went to school with him. So although I never had a ton of interactions with him, I feel like I knew him pretty well. And in the late 1970s, when I was a teenager, I was putting up signs for his campaigns in Oshawa.

His passing is the loss of a really great Canadian. He was the NDP leader from 1975 to 1989. He was a member of Parliament from 1968 to 1990 and, again, from 2004 to 2006, when Jack Layton asked him to run and to be part of the federal NDP again.

There are so many stories about Ed Broadbent, but two that I'd like to just briefly share—I recently read a book about John Robarts. John Robarts was the Conservative Premier of Ontario from 1961 to 1971. I saw Ed Broadbent at a convention, and I said, "I read this book about John Robarts." You know, he increased the high school graduation rate. He built our public colleges. He expanded our university system. He fought against public health care in 1965, but I said, "On a lot of the things that we care about, he seemed to be on the same side." Ed was old enough to remember John Robarts; I don't remember that time. But he said, "Yeah, he was a true Progressive Conservative." He really wanted to see progressive policies. He wanted to see people's lives made better and more affordable through progressive policies and through very affordable access to post-secondary education.

I would say that's something I wish this government would get back to. I've seen this Conservative government being taken over—the Conservatives and the Liberals. I mean, our whole political spectrum has shifted so far to the right that even fighting for public education, public health care, public colleges and universities—now, the NDP is the only party that's still fighting for those things.

The other story I'd like to tell about Ed Broadbent: I saw him in downtown Toronto just a couple of years ago, and he told a story about how the Constitution was repatriated, how it was written. He said that in the discussions, in the early 1980s, Pierre Trudeau just wanted equality rights enshrined in the constitution, but he didn't want to break down those rights. He didn't want to, so he said, "A person is a person is a person. We don't need to define who has those equality rights." Ed Broadbent had, I would say, a different understanding of equity and how equity is not giving the same thing to each person but making sure that everybody has the same opportunities.

There's a section, equality rights enshrined in our Constitution, and this is one of the things that Ed Broadbent fought for in the early 1980s. This is part of his legacy. I thank the members of the Legislature for giving me the opportunity just to put this on the record.

The equality rights: There are two sections of them. Everybody is entitled to equal protection and benefit under the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex or mental or physical disability. This is excepting affirmative action programs.

This is part of Ed's legacy. He passed away on January 11, 2024, at the age of 87, and he leaves a very important legacy for all of us in Canada.

I begin my speech now in downtown Toronto, where we have got a haze over the city from a forest fire, the largest forest fire in Texas's history. The smoke has reached us all the way up here in southern Ontario. Last summer, there were days and days in southern Ontario when we were engulfed with forest fire smoke from northern Ontario and from the western provinces because we had a record number of acres burned in Ontario last summer. There were 45 million acres of forest burned in Canada last year. That's three times the previous record. We are in the midst of an environmental crisis, and you

just have to step outside and look at the sky to see the impact of this environmental crisis.

This government has brought in legislation. This legislation that we're debating today is Bill 162. It's called the Get It Done Act. This act actually further reduces the Environmental Protection Act and removes the requirement for environmental assessments for projects like the 413. It's actually taking us backward. It's actually putting our environment and also our farmland at greater risk.

The excuse the government usually uses is that we need more housing. We all know we are in a housing crisis in Ontario. But this government's response is that they're selling off public services and assets to private for-profit corporations. Many of these are owned by their friends and colleagues. We all know that we have this housing crisis, but even tech companies—I'm the tech and innovation critic for the NDP—are telling me that the biggest barrier to attracting talent to Ontario is the lack of affordable housing.

Between 1972 and 1996, however, an average of 15,000 affordable and social housing units were built each year in Ontario, so we were building affordable housing. Then, in the 1990s, the federal Liberals cancelled the National Housing Strategy, and the provincial Conservatives started downloading housing responsibility onto cities. And the cities simply don't have the tax base to even maintain the housing that was downloaded, let alone build the housing that we need. So this crisis in affordable housing is 30 years in the making.

1610

To achieve the goal—this government set the goal, and it's the right goal, of 1.5 million new homes in 10 years. In order to achieve that goal, we should be starting 15,000 housing units a month. But last month, there were only 5,000 housing units started in Ontario. I want to contrast this with the New Democratic Party in British Columbia. There, per capita, they had three times the number of housing starts. They also had 5,000 housing starts, but they have a third of our population.

The reason that they're doing this is because they are using every tool that's available. They are building public housing. They are not afraid of saying, "Hey, you know what? The for-profit market is not building the housing we need, so we're going to just build it directly," just like previous governments did all the way from post-1945, after the Second World War, right up to the mid-1990s, when the federal Liberals and the Harris Conservatives cancelled their housing programs. So we need to get back to building housing. We need to get back to building public housing.

I want to give credit to the new mayor of Toronto—well, six months in office—Olivia Chow. Six months in, she already has a plan for 65,000 units of affordable housing. Within six months, she's already broken ground on 2,000 units, including a 900-unit co-op at 2444 Eglinton Avenue East. This is the biggest co-op—in fact, the only major co-op development that's been built since the last time the NDP were in government.

So we know the solutions. We need progressive policies. We need a government that's not afraid of just rolling up their sleeves and saying, "Hey, the for-profit market is not building the housing we need. We're going to do it directly." That's what Olivia Chow is doing in the city of Toronto. We need that plan across this city because housing is not affordable anywhere in this province anymore.

One of the things that I saw when I was travelling around this province last summer is that there are tent encampments in every major city. That's a legacy of this government and the last Liberal government, which were just afraid to build government housing, were afraid to build the housing we need, because we've known for decades that the for-profit market does not build housing that everybody needs.

So the title of this bill is "getting it done." I would prefer if the government had actually titled their bill and written a bill called "getting it right."

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: That would have been nice, eh? That would have been nice, and I'll just give you an example of getting it right versus getting it done. This government says they're getting it done. I was talking to my colleague from Sudbury earlier, and he was giving me an example. His father, one time, was given a job—a bunch of guys, a whole crew went out, and they were supposed to dig a trench. So they all had shovels. They all spent the whole morning digging the trench. Then, they broke for lunch. At lunchtime, they got a call, and they were told that they were digging the trench in the wrong location. So they spent the whole afternoon filling in the trench. In one sense, they got it done. They dug a trench, and then they filled in the trench. They got two things done. But from a practical perspective, they didn't really accomplish anything.

This government keeps passing bills and legislation, and then having to repeal them. They've done it seven times. There's seven different bills that this government has passed that they've had to repeal. So getting it done—they got something done. They passed a bill. And then they got something else done: They repealed the bills. So it's like the trench; it's really like the trench.

These bills that they've passed that they've had to repeal, we all knew that they needed to repeal them. Bill 124 imposed unconstitutional wage caps on public sector workers. This was just repealed a couple of weeks ago, after the Court of Appeal of Ontario overturned it and said this is an unconstitutional violation of the charter rights of public sector workers. Bill 28, they brought in Bill 28. It stripped education workers of their charter rights and it also stripped them of protections under the Ontario Human Rights Code. And the public, the people of Ontario, were very angry. The unions mobilized. They threatened a general strike, and the next week the government repealed Bill 28.

Bill 39 included changes to the Duffins Rouge agricultural plan, and that also was reversed.

Let's see. The dissolution of Peel: Bill 112. They decided they're going to dissolve Peel, break it into three

different municipalities, and then they crunched the numbers, and according to Patrick Brown, the dissolution was going to cost the taxpayers in Mississauga and Peel region \$1.3 billion, so they repealed that one.

I won't go through the other ones—oh, Bill 150 reversed the urban boundary expansions. So we all know about the greenbelt scandal that happened here, but one of the other things that happened is they expanded urban boundaries. So a lot of the Conservative developers—or friends of the Conservatives, developers—bought land just on the outskirts of cities, and this government expanded the urban boundaries of those cities to encompass that greenbelt farmland outside the cities. Then, the new Minister of Housing, when he was appointed, he said, “Hey, that process was wrong. We did not follow proper process.” He repealed it.

Do you know what's interesting about this bill here? They're back in. They're repealing the repeal. I've never seen that in the Legislature. Going back to the trench metaphor, this is like going back to digging the trench and then filling in the trench and then realizing hey, you know what, maybe we can put a trench here, let's dig it out again. You've got to wonder about all these reversals.

Let's just look at the greenbelt scandal: 7,400 acres were involved in the greenbelt scandal. The take on this—the Auditor General said that the developers who bought that farmland stood to make \$8 billion. They have paid \$300 million for it. She estimated that they'd be able to sell it for \$8.3 billion when the greenbelt protections were removed.

One of these developers bought 2,400 acres of greenbelt farmland. That developer, De Gasperis, he stood to make, looking at the numbers, just approximately \$2.6 billion. He also bought land on the outskirts of cities that were covered by the urban boundary expansions.

So why would the government expand these urban boundaries? Well, it was pretty clear that there was a lot of push. They said it was for housing, but there were also Conservative donors who had bought farmland there who were standing to profit. And then they reversed the urban boundary expansion, because it was a very hot item in the news and they were afraid that their popularity was diminishing.

Then, they reversed it again. So they're going to actually allow this developer to make a ton of money.

And the danger, for all of us in this province, is that we're losing farmland. I can't speak enough about the importance of farmland. Ontario is an enormous province. I used to teach a course on the history and economics of Ontario, and at the beginning of the year, I would put up a map of Ontario and then I'd superimpose a map of France over the northwest side of Ontario, and then I would superimpose a map of Germany on the northeast side of Ontario, and then I'd superimpose a map of Britain across southern Ontario. That's how big we are. We are a million square kilometres. That's how big this province is, but only 5% of that land is arable. Only 5% can be farmed. So we've got to protect our farmland.

Under the Liberals, we were losing 175 acres per day. Under this government, we're now losing 319 acres per day. That's 110,000 acres of farmland that we're losing every year. If we keep at this level of development on farmland, then we will have lost all our farmland before the end of the century.

Another project that this bill touches on is the 413. This bill allows the 413 to go ahead without an environmental assessment, without raising concerns about the environmental impact or the impact on our future food security. And it's absolutely frightening what they're doing, because even today, with a relatively small population and a large land mass, in Ontario, we import \$10 billion more food than we export. Let that sink in. We are already a net food importer and yet we are paving over 319 acres of farmland per year.

1620

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: I see the member opposite questioning my number. Look it up. Just Google it. We import \$10 billion more food than we export.

We also are welcoming 400,000 new people to Ontario every year, and one thing I know about those people—I can guarantee it: They will want to eat. And the most environmental and healthiest way to eat is to eat food that's grown locally. So we need to maintain our farmland. That's the purpose of the greenbelt. And yet, this government keeps cutting huge tranches out of the greenbelt. They did it with the 7,400 acres of the original greenbelt scandal. They did it with the expansion of the urban boundaries and they're doing it with the paving over for the 413.

This government is not only jeopardizing our environment—I speak about this at a time when, again, the city of Toronto is engulfed in smoke, this time from forest fires in Texas—but they're also jeopardizing our food security in the future. With global warming, it's going to be more and more difficult to grow food because we are seeing incredible swings in temperatures. We're seeing all kinds of climate crises around the world and it's making it more and more difficult for countries to grow food. At the same time, when we are in this environmental crisis, this government is paving over even more farmland than was paved over by the former Liberal government. This bill is of great concern to anybody who cares about the environment and also future food security in the province of Ontario.

I've got 45 seconds. I'll just mention the other thing I've got to say: The government is really good at selling their bills. When they brought this one out, they announced that there were going to be no more tolls on Ontario roads and then they didn't mention that—except the only road that has tolls is the 407, which the Conservatives sold to a private, for-profit, Spanish corporation at the time and sold a 99-year lease. So it's not just we who are paying those tolls; our children and grandchildren are going to be paying those tolls forever. But they got this blurb out in the media, this message out that, hey, they're going to remove tolls—except the one that exists.

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

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for his comments. He covered a number of subjects there and I'd maybe touch on one of them: the environment, he mentioned. Shockingly, it's an extremely important matter for this side of the House—the government—and a few teeny, tiny measures that we're doing, such as transit. You know, people have a choice to take the car or get on transit. The biggest transit expansion in the history of the province—a teeny, tiny measure.

Our energy system—90% greenhouse gas-free, given our thrust on nuclear.

Another teeny, tiny thing we're doing: steel industry—converting away from coal to electricity, electric cars.

So these legacy matters for the environment—hate to say. Wouldn't you agree that these are extraordinarily strong environmental measures the government is taking?

Mr. Chris Glover: Well, this government's and the previous Liberal government's record on transit is that they're doing it just like the digging of the trench and filling the trench back in because the Eglinton Crosstown is now 13 years into development—

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's it?

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, 13 years, but don't worry, there's no finish date. They still cannot release a finish date. Recently, just this week, we found out they're actually tearing up sidewalks because the concrete was not good enough. They're actually tearing up concrete that they just laid for this. They've torn up platforms that they just created. So this government is not actually getting anything done on transit.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: I always like to rise on a bill, Bill 162, it's called, "not getting it done." I think I'll speak on that all day. But one thing that I'm really passionate about, and I know the residents in Durham have become very passionate about is that there are only two toll roads in the province of Ontario, one is the 407, that we heard about, the 99-year lease. Madam Speaker, I'm sure you're aware of this: It was a Conservative government that signed the 99-year lease, just in case you forgot. I'm just trying to help you out a bit.

Now, Durham council is saying to the Conservatives that the only road that's being tolled is hurting the residents of Durham. So I'm going to say to my colleague, if the council wants the toll taken off, why do you think the Conservatives, who have five Conservatives that represent that area, out of six, are leaving it in this bill? It makes absolutely no sense. Do you agree with me, take the tolls off the 407 east?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for a response.

Mr. Chris Glover: Absolutely. As a person who grew up in Oshawa, yes, take the tolls off the 407 east. It's ridiculous that they're there. It's ridiculous that the 407 was sold off to a private, for-profit corporation.

The other thing this government should be doing, the 407—initially we paid for it and it was our asset. As taxpayers in Ontario, it was our asset. This government sold it off with a 99-year lease and then their tolls are so high that people can't afford to drive on it, and because they can't afford to drive on it, the 401 is much more congested. So the 407 was fined \$1 billion for increasing congestion, for not having enough vehicles on the road and increasing congestion on other roads. Do you know what this government did? The response is that they waived the billion dollars because they said, "Oh, the taxpayers of Ontario don't need that billion dollars back."

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

I recognize the Solicitor General.

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I listened very attentively to the member. I also want to acknowledge the late Mr. Ed Broadbent. He was a great Canadian, no matter where you sit as a parliamentarian in Canada.

Madam Speaker, the opposite of getting it done is not getting it done. The opposite of building roads and transit, infrastructure and hospitals is not doing it. So I just don't understand, having listened to the member, why he feels all the actions that the government is taking to lay the seeds for people to come here, to have a job and to start a family—I'd like to ask him a simple question. Why does he feel that getting it done is not good for people who want to start a family, have a job here and contribute to our economy?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for response.

Mr. Chris Glover: I want to thank the Solicitor General for the comment and especially the acknowledgment of Ed Broadbent, who was a great Canadian.

You don't get anything done if you don't get it right. If you keep having to reverse, then you're just spinning in circles and you're not actually accomplishing anything.

That's what's been happening with this government's housing plan. In order to build that 1.5 million homes over 10 years, we need to be starting 15,000 housing units per month in this province. Last month, there were 5,000 started, so only a third of what is needed to achieve that goal. So our housing shortage is exploding under this government because you're not getting it done.

I would just contrast this with the British Columbia NDP. They are also building 5,000—started 5,000 housing units last month—but they've got a third of the population. So their housing starts are three times per capita what ours are in Ontario. The NDP in British Columbia are getting it done, and they're getting it right.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'd like to say hi to two members of our excellent staff team, Kirsten Snider and Madeleine Vogelaar. Welcome. Hello. They do excellent work.

1630

My question is to the member for Spadina-Fort York. You mentioned that the BC government is taking a really

bold and sensible approach to the housing crisis, and we see that starts in BC are up by 11%. At the same time, housing starts in Ontario are actually going down. What is the BC government doing right? What lessons could the Conservatives learn from what the BC government is doing?

Mr. Chris Glover: What the BC government is doing to build those houses is that they're not afraid of building government housing. They're not afraid of just rolling up their sleeves and saying, "Hey, in the government, we're going to build housing." Because that's what we did from 1945 to 1995 in Ontario: the government built housing. The private sector was also building housing and we need the private sector as well, but the government wasn't afraid of doing it and the government built the housing that made it affordable.

After the Second World War, the government was building the strawberry box war houses that you still see in communities across this province. They built it so that the soldiers would have a home to return to when they got here. The government did this. This government? Somehow, the Conservative Party—I don't know what happened to them, but they call that a communist plan. I actually heard the member from Perth call it a communist plan.

So, what he really called was all the former Conservative Premiers who were building public housing, and that includes Bill Davis, George Drew, John Robarts, Leslie Frost—he called them all communists because they wanted to build housing because it's a solution that works. The British Columbia NDP are not afraid of building housing; they're doing it and they're getting it done and they're getting it right and people will have a place to live in British Columbia. I wish it was that case in Ontario.

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

Hon. Andrea Khanjin: I couldn't help notice that the member was quoting British Columbia. For British Columbia to achieve what they have, they have already been ahead of Ontario in terms of streamlining their environmental assessment process, which now we're finally modernizing in Ontario after 50 years of not having this process embrace some new technologies to modernize it.

If you're embracing your BC partners, who are doing such a great job on housing, shouldn't we adopt practices like EA modernization, as well?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'm afraid I couldn't hear the question that clearly, but I do thank the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for the question. I heard something about the environment, and I will just say environmental assessments are more and more important as we speak. One of the things that this government has done that's really bothered me is that they exempted the Ontario Place Therme deal from an environmental assessment, from the Environmental Bill of Rights, and so that project is going ahead in spite of all the environmental damage that's being done.

The 413 is being built and it's crossing 132 watersheds, and also there are 26 species that are at risk from the

development of the 413. There are tens of thousands of acres of farmland that could be paved over with the 413, especially if it leads to more sprawl. It's not the kind of housing that we need and it's certainly not going to leave the next generation or the next seven generations with a healthy environment. That is the legacy that we have to leave the next generation.

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

Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to get up and speak to the Get It Done bill, the predecessor to the "get it undone" bill, which will be the predecessor to the Get It Done bill and then to the next "get it undone" bill. So, backwards and forwards they go; backwards and forwards we go.

When I came in here this afternoon, it kind of felt like church. It was very quiet—almost holy. It felt like a place of sanctuary.

Mr. John Vanthof: You came in and it changed.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I came in and we're going to change all that, John. I hope you're speaking, too.

Let's just start with road tolls. Newspaper headlines across the province: "Ontario Banning Road Tolls." "They're banning it." "We're doing it; we're getting it done." But the tolls are still the same on the 407, the piece we don't own and the piece we do own. Is that right? Somebody can answer this when they get up in questions, but I don't think you're taking tolls off the provincial portion of the 407. And I think most Ontarians, when they looked at that, probably thought, "Oh, good." But there will be a sad reality when they find out that they're still paying tolls.

The members across the aisle like to bring up history all the time, like to throw stuff back in people's faces. What your government did while saying you want to ban tolls is you forgot that your party ensured that road tolls will be on the 407 and continue to increase in perpetuity, forever. You sold it. You've got no control. As a matter of fact, you forgave a billion dollars. So I don't think you're for drivers.

You know, that billion dollars would have been really handy. It would have prevented a lot of Ontarians from having to decide, "Do I need my credit card, or do I need my health card? Which one?" I'm not holding up the cards. I'd love to be able to do that, but I know the Speaker would let me know that that wasn't right. I want to be on my best behaviour this afternoon. Which one, folks? Which one?

Here's a suggestion: I think a member across the aisle could say, "You know what? I'm going to make an amendment to this bill, and I'm going to take tolls off the provincial portion of the 407." I challenge you to do that. That way, you would really be battling road tolls. I know you can't do anything about the mess that Mike Harris left us with the 407. You'd all have to agree that that was a mess, selling it off. I'll forgive you that—not that you'd forgive me anything that we didn't do such a good job on—but you guys really messed up on that one.

Maybe when we get to committee, we can see an amendment on the bill that says, "You know what? We're

wiping out the tolls on the provincial portion of the 407, all the way from”—it’s about Whitby, right? Is it Whitby or Brock? Someone correct me. Somewhere in there, that portion—I don’t know how long it is. The tolls aren’t as much. It’d be nice if you did something about tolls right now that actually meant a plug nickel in somebody’s pocket. I’d be more enthusiastic about supporting this bill—if I could support this bill. I’m not saying whether I will or I won’t, because there are some thing in there, like referendums—they aren’t a bad thing.

I think we should have had a referendum on carving up the greenbelt. I think we should’ve talked about that. If you like referendums, maybe we should have had one for that. Do you think maybe we could have had a referendum for for-profit health care, letting private, for-profit clinics take services out of hospitals? Or, hey, maybe a referendum for whether we should actually put some measures of control on temporary staffing agencies in health care, something that the government said they’re going to do for two years. They’ve got time for a nice show, but they can’t actually guard the taxpayer dollar by putting some guardrails around temporary health care agencies. Why don’t we have a referendum on whether we should have that or not?

We could have tons of referendums. What the heck? Every big government decision that you make, put it to a referendum. I don’t see you doing that. I see you talking about it. It’s nice. It’s great talk. They’re great headlines, guys. They’re great headlines. But actually, government isn’t about creating headlines on a daily basis.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I don’t know what’s in the Premier’s head, so I don’t want to take a guess.

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: No, in fairness, I’m not saying that that was his idea. It was somebody’s idea. It looked good.

Honestly, guys, you want to change environmental protections. What you’re saying is, “Trust me. No, I really wasn’t carving up the greenbelt for my friends. I really wasn’t changing urban boundaries for some of my friends or signing MZOs for some of my friends—really. But trust me, I’ll protect the environment, because that’s what’s top of mind in our government.” That’s what you’re trying to say here.

It’s hard to trust you on this. It really is. I’d like to say I trust you—

Interjection: But you can’t.

Mr. John Fraser: —but I’m not sure we can.

Mr. Aris Babikian: You should.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, that’s what your boss says to all you guys: “Trust me.” But I’m not sure that I would.

My gosh. It says it’s an omnibus bill, but usually the omnibus bills I used to see were like this thick. This thing is probably about this thick. I don’t have it here with me right now. It’s only omnibus in the sense that it’s not doing lots of things; it’s doing a whole bunch of not really big things, but some things that will have real impact and some things that will have no impact at all—because they’re all about the news release; they’re all about the thing you

want to say, like “We’re banning road tolls.” That announcement didn’t put one plug nickel, one penny, any money into people’s pockets, and it never will. As a matter of fact, to go back again, that 407—those tolls are going to increase in perpetuity, but you can prevent that, at least on the part that we own, so I challenge the government to put forward a clause and take it off. Because do you know what’s supposed to happen with a toll highway? A toll highway lasts for 30 or 40 years. You pay the highway—then you plan to take the tolls off, or you extend the highway or you improve it. But we don’t own it anymore. Somebody else owns it. I don’t think that’s good politics. But you’re banning road tolls.

1640

Licence fees being frozen—yes, I think that’s a good thing. I can support that. But we have to make sure that we don’t nickel and dime ourselves so that we can’t invest in mental health as much as we want to, or primary care or cancer surgeries. It’s all about choices. So when I see something like that, I’m happy that people are getting some support. But if they’re making that choice—which one?—I’m not sure that makes any difference. It’s good that you’re not going to raise the fees, but you’re not putting any money in their pockets. It’s not happening. You’re just not taking any more. That’s a good thing.

The question is, are we actually putting money into the things that matter most to people?

I’ll go back to primary care. Almost two million Ontarians don’t have a family care practitioner. That’s serious. It messes up our whole health care system—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the member from Ottawa South.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Please continue.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you.

There we go. I didn’t want to miss out on the questions, guys. That’s the best part. I want to hear great questions.

Have I gone over 10 minutes yet? Can the table—have I gone over 10?

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: No, no. I started at 14, I think, so I’m not quite at 10 yet.

I don’t want five minutes of questions. I want 10 minutes of questions, and they better be good questions, guys.

Again, “omnibus bill” sounds like it’s this heavy-duty thing that’s coming down on all of us, and we will not be able to sustain the weight of the omnibus bull—bill, or bull. Actually, that’s it: It’s the omnibus bull. That’s the best way to put it. My God, sometimes your mistakes work out.

Pardon me, Speaker. Pardon my irreverence.

In this—and I'm not going to stop saying it—omnibus bill, they're not doing very much. At least with certain kinds of bill stuff, you can grow things—but not with this bill.

Anyway, I digress. Sorry. I'm off on a bad spot. Now it feels alive in here, folks. You feel alive.

We're here, it's Thursday afternoon, and we're talking about really important things to Ontarians, like road tolls that will never exist but ones that will continue to go up; or licence fees that won't go up, but somehow that's putting money in your pocket; and referendums about things that governments should just damn well figure out for themselves. We have one—I'll support it—every four years. Right? So it gives you the power to make decisions. The problem is you can't over-read your mandate. If you want to look at it as a referendum, I think a plurality is something over 50%. And I'm not going there. You guys are the government; you earned the right; you worked hard. But as a referendum, it didn't give you carte blanche to do whatever you like.

Anyways, I think I've gone over my 10 minutes, so I'll get 10 minutes worth of questions and they better be good, folks. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It is now time for 10 minutes of questions.

Hon. Stan Cho: We could have 20 minutes of questions, Speaker. Look, I have a lot of respect for that member. He knows that. But earlier, two of your colleagues, the member from Beaches–East York and the member from Scarborough–Guildwood were talking about highways.

The member from Scarborough–Guildwood was bringing up some of the safety concerns along Highway 69. You know, good concerns, talking about how that highway needs to be twinned, good concerns, talking about some of the other highways in the north that need to be twinned. But then the member from Beaches–East York talked about how Highway 413 shouldn't be built, how it's a bad highway, talked about the climate crisis that would come if we built those highways. So my question is—and I didn't get an answer when I posed it to those two members—what does the Ontario Liberal Party stand for? Do you want to build highways or not? Yes to highways or no to highways?

Mr. John Fraser: Thanks. That's a great question. What I tried to say to the Minister of Transportation this morning, when everybody was touting all the roads that he built, it takes about seven years to eight years to plan and build a road. So the roads that you're cutting the ribbons on were planned and started by people on this side here.

Now, in fairness, that happened when we came into government. So here's the thing: The north needs safe roads. The member from Scarborough–Guildwood, who is not from the north, can see that. She saw that when she went up north and that's why she mentioned it.

Now the 413—because I'm trying to get this in under a minute—if we actually still owned the 407, maybe you wouldn't need the 413. So the things that I get concerned about are the same things I saw in the greenbelt giveaway,

aligning along 413, so I would hope that it's not about land speculation.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's always great to stand and rise on 162, the “not getting it done” bill. But I'm going to ask my colleague from the Liberal Party: Do you support tolls, and do you agree with the NDP that we should take the toll off the 407 east, knowing full well that there are five MPPs from that side representing that area, and the Durham council has just said, “Listen, take the toll off the 407 east.” You can't do it on the 407 because they sold it off and signed a crazy deal for 99 years, something like they do in long-term care. But my question to you: Do you agree with the NDP that they should take the tolls off the 407 east and support the councils that are representing that area?

Mr. John Fraser: I thank the member. And I did mention that in my presentation: Amend it. If you're banning tolls and you're charging tolls—because I'll say, you're not charging tolls on that part of the 407 but you are charging tolls on the eastern part. So you're not banning them because you have control over that. So if it really meant you were banning tolls, then you wouldn't be charging tolls on the part that's east of Brock, I guess, on the 407. I think that's fair minded. I think that's reasonable. You have control over the tolls. You're banning tolls except for the one toll that you do have.

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

Mr. Matthew Rae: Sorry, Stan.

Hon. Stan Cho: Not at all. It's all you, man.

Mr. Matthew Rae: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to ask the member from Ottawa South a question. As the member from Ottawa South knows very well—I believe he was PA to health under the previous Liberal government—the fact is that the previous Liberal government didn't expand primary care. He brought it up in his remarks, Speaker. And I was wondering if the former PA to health, the member for Ottawa South, can please explain why the Ontario Liberal Party members in this House voted against—because it was in last year's budget—the expansion to primary care and did not do anything for 15 years?

1650

Mr. John Fraser: The premise of the question, that we didn't do anything, is nonsense, because if you even look economically, we led the G7 in jobs and growth for five years until 2018. We were top three for foreign direct investment. We had historic investments too in public transit, in hospitals—all sorts of things.

And you know what? When we did those investments, guess who voted against it? Not you guys, but there are a few who did vote against it on the other side. So let's not—

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: A budget is a confidence motion in a government. If you wanted to go and vote on each thing, I'm not going to vote against that. But I'm going to vote against things that I don't believe in.

Here's the other thing: I know you guys are big on auto, but guess what? In 2009—the bailout, the crisis—we had a vote in this House. Guess who voted against the bailout? Your party. So don't throw that stuff out. It was a good question, but forget that stuff, because you guys voted against as many things as we did, and far worse.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I've been here a while, and sometimes you hear things that just defy logic. One of the things was, years ago when the Ontario Liberal Party, when they were in government, sold off 60% of Hydro One and said that the province would retain control. That just defied logic.

I'm not from here; I'm from farther north, so I didn't know there was a 407 and a 407 east. We're now told that the government is banning tolls while they're still collecting tolls. I don't think the government is going to explain that, but perhaps my colleague on the Liberal side could explain that.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you for that question. Yes, you're right on hydro—100%. I'll just say that.

Yes, the government is collecting tolls while it's outlawing—okay. Did I say that? They're collecting tolls while they're proposing a law to outlaw them—collecting tolls but outlawing them.

There's a solution to that: Amend your bill; take the tolls off the 407 east. And you know what? You'll get support from all of us.

Mr. John Vanthof: Let us help you.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, we're trying to help you here.

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

Hon. Stan Cho: I didn't hear an answer to the primary care question posed by the ray of hope for Perth–Wellington, so I'll give you an opportunity—to the honourable member—to answer either that question on primary care or maybe my question, because—

Mr. David Smith: It wasn't answered.

Hon. Stan Cho: It wasn't answered, right? I asked, do you stand for the building of highways or against the building of highways? Your members are on record saying they support the twinning of 69. They even called for expansion of 17, 11. Highway 3 is something we're expanding, building more bridges in that sense. The question is, then, why is what's good for so much of Ontario in the north and southwestern Ontario not good enough for the GTA west corridor?

In Peel region you don't have a single seat. In fact, all of Peel region's seats and York region's seats sit here on the government side, and I think the voters speak the loudest. They clearly said they wanted those highways. So the question is, which is it? Do you stand for highways or do you not stand for highways?

Mr. John Fraser: You would know in your previous role that some of the highways that you cut the ribbon on didn't start under your government, so I think we're for building highways.

And I think the member from Scarborough–Guildwood just said, “Look, I was up north. I heard this.” She doesn't live there. Those aren't her constituents. She's not searching for votes up there. There's a big problem.

I just said earlier, if you hadn't sold the 407 or if the tolls were lower or if you took some of the tolls off it, maybe you wouldn't need quite as much as you're building right now. That's the kind of thing you have to think about.

I would just say to members of this House, go and take a look at the map of who owns all the land on the 413 and their connections to the government. You might find some of the same names that you found in the Auditor General's report—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Final question.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question, very quickly: This schedule 1 where they're cutting the environmental assessment protections again—in it, they're also giving the government more extraordinary power to expropriate land, and farmers along the route are concerned about that. What do you think about this government giving themselves the power to expropriate land even before they've done an environmental assessment?

Mr. John Fraser: That's not a good idea. I don't think any of us who had constituents that lived along that highway or were threatened with expropriation would think that it would be very fair that we're giving—governments have pretty good powers to expropriate already. It's an extreme measure. Giving a government more power—look, it's all well and good. You can support it while you're on that side, because you have to, but when you're on this side and it's happening in your community, you're not going to be very happy in five years.

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

Hon. Stan Cho: Can we have another five minutes?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Unfortunately, those 10 minutes have ended.

I recognize the member for Mississauga–Erin Mills.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Today, I stand in the House to debate Bill 162, Get it Done Act.

I'm really very happy to speak about this bill because this act is a fulfilment of the promises we made in 2018 and 2022. We promised that we would keep costs down and build infrastructure at the same time. Our government has always been for the people of Ontario and today, once more, we are getting it done for the people of Ontario.

Madam Speaker, I want to start by thanking the Minister of Transportation for his hard work, both for introducing this bill and for being part of the largest infrastructure expansion in Ontario's history.

From highways to transit projects, this government, under the leadership of the Premier, is getting it done, building the transportation infrastructure that Ontario needs for its long-term success. All the while, this government has continued to keep costs down for Ontarians, never raising a single tax.

When we talk about transportation infrastructure, it is very simple: People and goods need to be able to get around this province at an affordable cost. Time is money. If people are sitting in gridlock for endless hours or paying costly taxes, then we as a government have failed.

The government's role must be to get it done and get out of the way. This is the analogy we have been using. That's why I support this bill and why these changes to transportation infrastructure and affordability are well needed.

Madam Speaker, a major announcement for the people of Mississauga was announced earlier this month by the Minister of Transportation: Two-way, all-day GO train service is coming to the Milton line. Whereas service is currently only available during peak hours, the government plans to allow more services with extended hours of operation. For residents in Erin Mills, this means that Erindale, Streetsville, Meadowvale and Lisgar GO stations will have all-day transit connections into and out of the city.

The Milton GO rail corridor is already the fourth busiest line on the GO network. It is used daily by many Erin Mills residents.

These investments are critically needed and it's great to see the government continuing to invest in important infrastructure such as this.

Since 1999, when I started commuting by train into Toronto, there have been minimal changes to improve the Milton line. I think we added one extra train in the morning and one extra train back in the evening. So, that's 25 years ago. Mississauga is now significantly larger than 25 years ago—maybe 10 times the population of 25 years ago—but no investments have been made in that past 25 years on this line.

This is why we are calling on the federal government to agree to a cost-sharing partnership for this important rail corridor, which is going to benefit Mississauga and Milton as well.

1700

The former federal Minister of Transportation has endorsed this project. I am hopeful that the federal government will now invest in this critical infrastructure to support the people of Mississauga and Milton and support the growth of Mississauga as the seventh-largest city in Canada.

North America's largest transit infrastructure expansion is happening right here in Ontario, and that includes long-overdue investments into Mississauga. We are getting it done. Once again, I thank the Minister of Infrastructure and the Premier for this important investment.

These investments demonstrate the government's commitment to building infrastructure. With a rapidly growing population, Ontario needs transit, highways and housing to accommodate everyone. What we build now will be relied upon by future generations to come.

That's why this proposed Get It Done Act is focused on quickly and efficiently building infrastructure. If passed, this bill would reduce project planning timelines for construction of important infrastructure projects. It would

expedite and streamline regulations that are slowing down public projects. This will allow projects like roads and sewage treatment systems to be built quickly and efficiently while still maintaining rigorous protections where necessary. By accelerating these projects, municipal governments and public agencies will be able to complete their tasks on time and within budget.

One way that this bill will, if passed, help accelerate timelines is by clarifying the procedures surrounding expropriation during the environmental assessment process. It's already allowed under the Environmental Assessment Act to acquire properties before the EA process is completed. But by providing greater clarity, municipalities and other proponents can create clearer plans and get shovels in the ground much sooner. These are simple, common-sense steps that this government's proposing to get developments built. It's not flashy, but it will get the job done.

In Mississauga, we continue to make major investments into infrastructure in partnership with our municipal counterparts. For example, the new Mississauga hospital will give a much-needed replacement to the health care infrastructure in Mississauga, allowing more capacity for this growing city, the biggest hospital in Canadian history. The biggest ER room in Canada will be in Mississauga with 900-plus rooms. This is a huge investment, and as we said, time is money. We can accelerate the process getting things done. This is what we are trying to do if this bill passes.

The South Common Community Centre in my riding will also be receiving renovations very soon, allowing it to continue to be a hub for activities for our local neighbourhood. This is all part of our government's infrastructure revolution to continue building Ontario.

Let me give you another example: Highway 413. The 413 will be built through Peel and Vaughan to bypass the busy Highway 401 in Toronto. It will save commuters time and it will get goods and people flowing. More and more people continue to come to the greater Horseshoe area to live and work. The infrastructure is needed to accommodate and handle this increased demand.

When it comes to building infrastructure, the Liberals have made their stance clear: They are opposed to building new highways and infrastructure. When the Liberal leader was mayor of Mississauga, she voted against building the 413. She said the highway would be "disastrous," but Ontarians know the truth. The real disaster for Ontario would be Bonnie Crombie and the Ontario Liberals. They are not willing to build highways or transit or housing or any infrastructure. Our government, led by this Premier, are the only ones prepared to get it done.

Speaker, infrastructure is only half the picture. If people cannot afford to use infrastructure, then we cannot see the full benefits. That's why we must continue to make life affordable for all Ontarians, and I'm pleased to see the government taking initiative to do that.

The One Fare program, which came into effect earlier this week, is saving commuters money when they transfer between transit agencies. Residents from Mississauga can

transfer between MiWay, GO Transit, TTC and many other GTA transit organizations while only paying one fare for the trip. This adds both affordability and convenience, allowing more options for connections at cheaper costs. And this program is expected to save transit riders an average of \$1,600 per year. Every single commuter will save \$1,600 per year. This is not pocket change. That is substantial savings being put right back into the wallets of hard-working Ontarians.

Likewise, the government has already been working hard on saving money for drivers and vehicle owners. In the spring of 2022, the government removed licence plate renewal fees and stickers. For many vehicle owners, this has saved them over \$100 per year, per person, per car. Now, in this bill, the government proposes not only extending that cost savings, but also making the entire renewal process automatic, providing both convenience and affordability.

We might also discuss driver's licence fees and photo card fees. In 2019, the government implemented a freeze on renewal fees of drivers' licences and photo cards. As a result, in the years since then, over \$22 million has been saved for Ontarians. This legislation proposes permanently freezing those fees, because our government believes in keeping costs down for the people. Our government has not increased a tax on the backs of Ontarians, and they are not increasing these fees.

Our government is working hard to make sure that every Ontarian is able to get cheaper and convenient transportation all throughout this province, which brings me to a pivotal piece of today's proposed bill, the Protecting Against Carbon Taxes Act.

If passed, this legislation would enshrine in the laws of Ontario that the provincial government will not impose a carbon tax without the consent of the people. It would be a fair referendum, organized by the Chief Electoral Officer, with standard rules and procedures, and requiring a 50% majority of the vote to pass. This is not unusual. The Taxpayer Protection Act, 1999, provided for a similar referendum mechanism. This would ensure we have a fair and democratic process for establishing a new tax, if any future government wishes to impose one.

We have seen the damage that a federal carbon tax has imposed on our nation. The carbon tax has caused the prices of everything in Ontario to go up, because every item we buy—whether it's food, clothes, materials for industry—has a transportation cost. These costs were affected and increased by the carbon tax. Every household in Ontario has had their costs increase because of the carbon tax, such as the higher cost of heating. So despite the efforts of our provincial government working hard to make life easier, the federal government is forcing harder choices on the people of Ontario, whether they heat their homes or feed their families.

I noticed on my heating bill a \$64 item as carbon tax—\$64 of carbon tax monthly. So when the federal government says it's not significant, I say no; the carbon tax has caused the day-to-day cost of households to go significantly higher.

We have seen the problems of the carbon tax, and we don't want to see it again. So this bill proposes a simple and reasonable solution: Before any government force a carbon tax, they must get the consent of the people in a fair referendum. This is not a hypothetical situation.

1710

We can trust that this Ontario PC government would not impose a carbon tax, but the same cannot be said about all future administrations. In fact, the Liberals have already done this before. Premier Wynne told everyone that she wasn't planning on implementing a carbon pricing system, but just a short while later the Liberal government implemented a disastrous cap-and-trade carbon tax.

In the subsequent election, Ontarians elected our government to repeal that carbon tax. We did that. We got it done. But we have learned our lessons from the provincial and federal carbon taxes. Carbon taxes do not work. They hurt people, and Ontarians do not want another carbon tax. That's why by passing this bill, we would be giving power back to the people to decide for themselves if they want the provincial carbon tax. The people of Ontario deserve a say in this.

Therefore, our government is building infrastructure quickly, all the while making life more affordable for Ontarians. Just to name a few, we are building Highway 413, the Hazel McCallion Line, two-way, all-day GO on the Milton line. The Get It Done Act would make it easier to get this infrastructure built, including municipal projects and provincial priorities.

Affordability measures are making life easier for everyone. This includes the One Fare transit program, the elimination licence plate stickers, freezing the driver's licence and photo card renewal fees and ensuring no new carbon tax can be imposed without the will of the people.

The Ontario government, led our amazing Premier, is laser-focused on making life affordable for everyone. Whether they call it carbon tax, a toll or a fee, at the end of the day there is only one taxpayer. The Liberals and NDP are willing to raise taxes and fees for Ontarians; we are not. The Liberals and NDP will cost Ontarians; we will not.

Our government is here for the people of Ontario because Ontarians trust us, and we will not let them down. We will get it done. Thank you.

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

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you to the member from Mississauga—

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Erin Mills.

Mr. Chris Glover: Erin Mills, okay. Anyway, thank you for your comments.

I noticed you said that your government hasn't increased the tax, but that's not quite true because in the city of Mississauga, this government passed Bill 23, which waived development fees and those development fees cost the city of Mississauga \$90 million per year. So this is downloaded onto the taxpayers.

It's downloaded onto the taxpayers of the province and off to the municipality of Mississauga. And in spite of

giving \$200 million—actually, for Peel region it's \$200 million but for Mississauga it's \$90 million a year. In spite of giving a \$90-million gift to developers from the taxpayers of Mississauga, Mississauga was only able to achieve 27% of the housing target starts that they were supposed to build. So you're raising taxes and—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Response?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to my colleague opposite. First of all, we didn't waive all the developers' fees. This is what you say. This is what some of the media likes to say. We said we are waiving the developer fees for the rentals, not-for-profit and attainable homes, and that's it. The normal development is not waived. They still pay the fees for development.

Number two: Despite the fact that Mississauga was only achieving 27% of the goal, because we kept pushing, I can count from one traffic light 11 cranes or 11 risers at the same time in Mississauga.

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

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills. Climate change—I wanted to say that for the benefit of the member from Beaches—East York. This government is quite aware of climate change. That's why we are leading the way in EV production. We're fitting steel plants with electric burners. And we're building new transit and taking thousands of cars off the road.

Can the member expand on how this bill assists with the expansion of our transit systems?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I really thank my colleague for that important question. When we are talking about building public projects which will serve people, which will help us to expand our housing plans, helping municipalities to get the water, sewage, roads and everything else needed to start developing and delivering their goals of housing, we need to make it fast, we need to make it efficient, we want to make it in time. We want to achieve our goal of housing.

We are in a housing crisis. No matter what we are pushing, it looks like we still have not yet gotten what we want. This government will continue pushing to get those housing targets done.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills. Bill 23, just to be clear, has removed the fee that developers have to pay to affordable housing projects. Every development no longer has to pay the fee for affordable housing projects, and that part of Bill 23 is in force. What that has meant is that municipalities have lost funding for affordable housing and shelter at a time when we have a homelessness crisis. The city of Toronto has lost \$200 million in funding just for affordable housing and shelters.

My question to the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills is, what is this government going to do to make municipalities whole so there's funding available for affordable housing?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I really don't understand the controversy in this question. You are saying that you are upset that the government discounted the affordable housing development, removed the developer fees for that. But on the other side, you are asking us, "What are you going to do about affordable housing?"

My question for you: In Mississauga, I didn't see affordable housing development for many years. Now we are removing some obstacles to get more entities interested to build affordable housing. Why should you expect that every developer fee has been waived? This is not clear in the media and in the talk about affordable houses. Affordable houses are supported and subsidized for the low-income.

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

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: To the member from Mississauga—Erin Mills: Do you feel that electric vehicles alone will solve the climate crisis?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: There's no bulletproof or one-bullet solution for that. Climate change is a much bigger umbrella. One of them would be trying to get emissions down as much as possible. Lots of that would be car emissions, but there are many other aspects of that, such as the industrial. And again, Canada—I keep reiterating that for the people who talked about emissions, but our neighbours in the south have the biggest emissions in the whole world percentage-wise after China, I believe. So we are a very small percentage. We can get a per cent of that percentage down. We can meet our goals, but that's not going to solve that—

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

1720

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the great member from Mississauga—Erin Mills, my neighbour riding. I wanted to ask the member to talk a little bit about affordability. Our government has a great track record with bringing in measures that are helping Ontarians in their everyday lives, whether it's the sticker fees that we put through, lowering energy costs, the low-income tax credit, the gas tax cut, we have a track record and we have a track record because we've talked to the people of Ontario. You've talked to the people in your riding; I've talked to the people in my riding. The people on this side are talking to the people on the street.

My question to the member opposite is, what is in this bill that's going to help the people of Ontario?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: There's many items in this bill, actually. As I mentioned, changing the procedures to get things done faster, building the 413, putting infrastructure in place because, if you stay on the highway in gridlock for half an hour, you are not arriving to your destination and you are emitting more gas emissions while you are delayed on the highway. If the whole trip would take, let's say, an hour, and we save 20 minutes, which is one third, I have saved one third of the emissions, hypothetically. So this bill is helping in this.

And again, the other thing which is not helping is, every time we do a gas tax cut of two cents or three cents, the federal guys say, “phase 5, phase 9, phase 11,” and add more taxes and more taxes and more taxes.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Final question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to address my colleague across the row when he talks about EVs. You have not mentioned the fact that the reason why we’ve been successful at EVs in this province is because of Unifor and their incredible bargaining that they did at the bargaining table in their last round of contracts. If it wasn’t for their bargaining committee, Oshawa would have been closed. And if you guys remember, not that long ago, your Premier stood up and said, “That boat has sailed. It’s gone away.” So thanks to the union workers and brothers and sisters there that provide the best things.

But to my colleague, I’m going to ask this question again because my colleague the MPP from Oshawa really came up with something that kind of makes this bill laughable when you say you’re not going to charge tolls. The 407 east tolls, which are owned by the province of Ontario, which are paying tolls as we stand here today, the Durham council in that Oshawa area have asked to have those tolls taken off—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for a response.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: We are taking some steps. It might not be the final steps. I don’t know if there’s negotiations going on about that; I’m not aware of that. This is kind of the other side of the world for me because I’m on the Mississauga side. So I’m not sure about that.

But that doesn’t mean that it’s not on the table. We don’t know. It can be added. I don’t know. But we, at least, are taking a few steps towards that. We are trying to remove the tolls and make sure that we save the people some money.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: I’m very pleased to be standing up here this afternoon on a Thursday to speak to the Conservatives’ new bill called the Get It Done Act. When I read the bill, when I think about what this bill is going to get done, I think this bill is going to spur the construction of expensive and very large single-family homes that very few people can afford and it is going to make it easier and quicker to build a multi-million dollar highway, Highway 413, that no one is recommending be built. I’m also concerned about what this bill reveals about this Conservative government’s terrible approach to addressing climate action because, instead of moving forward with a price on pollution, this government wants to politicize action on climate.

I want to first talk about sprawl. I feel like I’m watching the same movie again and again and again. When I open up this bill, Bill 162, and I look at it again, what I see is the same movie playing out once again. The movie that we are talking about is the move by the Conservatives to meddle with planning processes again and redraw

municipal boundaries of Halton and Waterloo and Peel and York and Wellington county, areas that abut some of the most productive farmland in North America. They have rezoned this land in order to green-light development. That is what is happening in this bill.

This is a government that is being investigated by the RCMP for allegedly making secret, sweetheart deals with a very small handful of developers to rezone their land so they can make a whole lot of cash extremely quickly at the expense of the environment, at the expense of farmers and at the expense of the greenbelt. It looks to me like this bill is going to be doing the same thing, but you’re hoping that having the municipality officially request it makes it all look okay and it makes all the dodgy stuff go away.

We are already seeing reporters go through the rezoning that is now going to be happening because the municipal plans have been rewritten and then rewritten again and then rewritten again and now, they’re rewritten again. Reporters are already going through this new rezoning that’s happening and they’re seeing some—I don’t know—interesting stuff.

For instance—I’m going to read at this point—there is a residential development in Caledon that will now proceed on a patch of green space in an “island” of housing in a sea of warehouses. This land—surprise, surprise—is owned by big donors to the Conservative Party. Okay. Coincidence?

Interjection: I think not.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Let’s let the RCMP decide.

Interjection.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes, well, I don’t have the police calling me, asking me for an interview.

Okay. Protections will now be removed from agricultural land to build 120,000-square-foot industrial building with an approximately 400-to-500 truck-and-trailer parking near the future Highway 413. So, when we’re talking about land speculation, maybe this could be it. Once again, the land is owned by a Conservative Party donor. Is it a coincidence? Let’s let the RCMP decide.

Then there’s a golf course that is now going to be rezoned to allow for residential development, and this golf course is owned by—

Hon. Stan Cho: Point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the member for University–Rosedale.

I recognize the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Stan Cho: Standing order 25(b)(i)—nowhere close to the subject matter of the debate. It’s been going on all afternoon, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I will agree. Let’s go back to the contents of the bill, please.

Ms. Jessica Bell: So, to be clear, all the examples that I am listing are examples that have been rezoned in this bill that I’m talking about. It is directly related to the regulations and the laws that are being changed with this Get It Done bill.

Interjection.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Maybe it was the golf course thing that piqued your attention and before that you were you were just checking out.

The golf course is owned by a PC Party donor with links to the De Gasperis family. Once again: Is this a coincidence? Let's let the RCMP investigate and find out, because chances are, they will. It looks kind of fishy.

My question, and this is a question that a lot of Ontarians are asking, is that is this government making decisions to help the people of Ontario or is this government making decisions to help their developer-donor friends? Which is it? Because that's the question that a lot of people are asking. Is this the Get It Done bill or is this the "go to prison" bill? I don't know.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Say that again. That was good. I liked that one.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'll just say it once.

What I would like to hope for is I would like this government to move forward on the kind of laws and policies that are going to address our housing affordability and our housing supply crisis. That's what I would like to see. That's what I would like to see in this bill. That's what I would have liked to see in Bill 23 and a whole lot of the other bills that you're introducing.

1730

When we're talking about fixing the housing supply and housing affordability crisis, I think about the recent bill that the leader of the Green Party introduced—a plan that is also in our own election platform, that we advocate for ourselves, which is to allow fourplexes on residential lots in towns and cities across Ontario. Three parties support it. Where are you? When we're talking about building more housing for Ontarians—families, newcomers, students, people who want to downsize, people who want to buy their first home—building more homes and apartments in areas that are already zoned for development will give people more affordable housing options to rent and buy. And this government, when we ask them this question, it's absolute crickets.

How about increasing density on transit routes, building more apartment buildings near transit routes? This government has given a whole lot of good talk about that, but the city of Toronto has been waiting two long years for this government to approve Toronto's official plan so that Toronto can build more density as well as affordable housing near transit stations. We're still waiting for that. I would have really liked to have seen that in this bill.

And it would be amazing if this government fast-tracked affordable housing projects—

Hon. Stan Cho: Point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize once again to the member from University–Rosedale.

I recognize the Minister of Long-Term Care.

Hon. Stan Cho: This isn't fun for me, but it has been eight minutes of debate and there's nothing even close to talking about the bill. She's running out of time. It's the same standing order, Speaker: 25(b)(i).

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Actually, I will allow the member to continue. I see, in schedule 3, a lot of this is relevant.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, Speaker.

When we're talking about building more affordable housing, the project that comes to mind is the 59-modular-home project in the MPP for Willowdale's riding. That project has been stuck in the lands tribunal for two years now.

Hon. Stan Cho: They just won it. You should stay up to date.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Actually, no. It's going to court.

Interjection.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Maybe it happened today. But I checked pretty recently.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I'm going to remind the members to go through the Chair. Thank you.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you.

That's what I'd like to see.

And then when we're talking about Highway 413—there are a lot of people who have extremely long commutes in the GTHA, because where their school is is very far from where they live and work and play. It just takes them a long time to get anywhere. It is true that, when we look at all the cities and the congestion rates around North America, Toronto is one of the worst. There is a lot that we can do to fix the transportation and the transit issues that we have. I don't think building Highway 413 is going to solve our transportation issues. When you look at the amount of money that is going to be spent on that highway and the amount of time that people will save while driving on it—it's not 30 minutes; it's a minute. It's not going to save people time.

When we're talking about investing in new infrastructure projects to ensure that our economy works and that people can get from A to B at an affordable price and have choice, it's essential that we do smart urban planning and we build more homes near where people work and play and go to school. It's essential that we invest in public transportation, like the GO—we're still waiting for all-day, two-way GO—and we need investment in local municipal transit systems. I don't see that, and that's what we need.

I'm pleased that I was given the opportunity to speak on this bill, and I welcome your questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): We have time for questions.

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for her remarks. She touched on a couple of subjects.

Before I start, I want to say the words "climate change" for the member from Beaches–East York, just to put it on the record.

I noted the speaker's comments on housing and, in particular, the topic of intensification. I'd just like to make it very clear that of the 1.5 million homes that will be built over the next 10 years, the vast, vast majority of them will be intensification within existing municipal boundaries. In fact, I hope she would acknowledge that the new housing

policy passed by the city of Toronto last fall was a direct result, frankly, of the work this government has done. Would she agree that that intensification is the right approach for housing in our province?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound on raising the matter of intensification.

Let's go back to Bill 23. There are some measures in Bill 23 that I thought made sense; there are a lot that didn't. One measure that I liked was the decision by the Conservative government to allow three residential homes on one residential lot. That was a good decision. We are asking for our government to go further and allow fourplexes, because our housing crisis is so acute, and it is also extremely important in areas like the city of Toronto to really encourage the kind of density that we need near transit stations so that people can get to where they want to go, live near public transit. Unfortunately, the city of Toronto's official plan—we've been waiting for a very long period of time for the Conservative government to approve it, and the city of Toronto's official plan does allow for increased density. So I'm looking forward to seeing you say yes to that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I'd like to acknowledge that we have a special guest in the gallery, Rev. Cheri DiNovo, the member for Parkdale–High Park from the 38th to 41st Parliaments. Welcome.

Applause.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Continue. I recognize the member for Beaches–East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Thank you to the member from University–Rosedale for those scintillating words this afternoon. This government has done a lot of things, proposed a lot of policy, and then they've gone ahead, and they've come back and reversed it and gone ahead and reversed it, and people are losing trust out there. They just want to have a better, more sustainable Ontario. I'm just wondering, with the proposal to amend the Environmental Assessment Act, do you have faith that they will be able to do that or that they're going to do that properly, safely, sustainably?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Beaches–East York for that question. I have a lot of concerns about decisions to water down the environmental assessment process again and again and again. This is not the first time we have seen these kinds of measures.

There's this idea with making legislation where you measure twice and cut once. What we see with this government is that they measure and cut at the same time. Maybe they don't even measure at all; they just cut, cut, cut and see what happens. We've seen this with Bill 124, the unconstitutional wage caps. We have seen this with the heavy use of the “notwithstanding” clause to interfere in the right for people to collectively bargain. We have seen this with the greenbelt act. We have seen this with them dissolving and now reforming the Peel region. It happens again and again and again. That's what concerns me. You have a lot of power. You have a lot of responsibility. Use it wisely.

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

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner: I want to thank the member opposite for her remarks. I want to ask the member opposite, does she not feel, when we have a constancy and a stability of providing a climate for people to work and to live and to grow a family here through getting it done, when we have these issues, just as we were debating in the bill, getting it done—getting it done is meaning that we have this constancy and we're doing things so people will come here and raise a family and feel safe in their communities too.

So, Madam Speaker, my question is very, very simple: Does she not feel that the stability and the surety that is in this bill will encourage people to come here and work and raise a family and contribute to our economy?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Goodness—thank you for the statement from the Solicitor General. There are a lot of people in Ontario who are choosing to move to other provinces. We are seeing net migration out of Ontario to Alberta and BC and the Maritime areas and Saskatchewan, because Ontario is so expensive. They cannot afford to rent a home or buy a home with the wages that they're getting, and they're taking their skills and their talents with them. They're health care workers, construction workers, the kind of specialists that we need here. It is a big problem.

If we are going to ensure that people stay here in Ontario and raise a family here, live their lives here, then we really need to address the housing affordability crisis and make it possible again for people to rent and buy a home that they can afford.

1740

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciate the remarks from my colleague the member for University–Rosedale. She talked a bit about the cost-of-living pressures that people in her community and across the province are experiencing. She talked about the tolls, for example, on Highway 417. Now, this bill prohibits tolls on provincial highways that don't have tolls. So I wondered what her opinion is on whether that provision to remove tolls from highways that don't have tolls is going to really help Ontarians deal with the affordability crisis that we are seeing in this province.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you so much for that question. Removing tolls on roads that don't have tolls is not going to result in people having more money to pay the bills, to buy food at the supermarket and to pay their rent at the start of the month. It's just not going to.

We've got a provincial budget coming up shortly. My hope is that in this provincial budget we see some real investments in public services, we see some real measures to address the affordability crisis, because what I'm seeing in the Get It Done bill is not going to cut it, is not going to make things more affordable.

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

Mr. Trevor Jones: Thank you to the member from University–Rosedale for her eloquence. I want to compare and contrast something. I think of traffic gridlock in my communities of Leamington and Chatham-Kent. It happens twice a year. They're both celebratory: Hogs for Hospice in Leamington and probably our holiday parades.

The traffic gridlock in Toronto and in your community, your home community, is the real deal and it's infuriating. It diminishes family time—time with family and friends and being at home and being productive. So does the member from University–Rosedale not believe that genuine investments in Highway 413, in the Ontario Line, in the Scarborough subway extension—will they not reduce gridlock, contribute to better family time, better productivity and be more welcoming to people from all over that are coming to make Toronto and Ontario their home?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you so much to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington. I was just canvassing this afternoon and one of the people I was talking to, I asked him, “What are you mad about?” And he said, “The traffic. The traffic drives me crazy.” He said people won't even come downtown now because they just don't want to deal—they just don't want to spend that much time in a car. We have some of the worst congestion problems in North America right here in the GTHA and we've had it for decades. Highway 413 is not going to solve our congestion issues. When we look at what experts are saying, how much it's going to cost, how much time it's going to save people, maybe it's a minute. It's a minute.

There are better things that we can do. There are better things we can invest in to help people get from A to B at an affordable price and spend time with their families or doing what they want to do in their spare time, in their free time—investing in transit, doing smart urban planning so people live near where they work and play so that they don't have to spend an hour and a half in a car in the first place, really thinking about where we're going to put our employment hubs so that we're thinking it through and people don't just have to come to downtown Toronto for that job. There's a lot we can do. I don't think Highway 413 is the answer.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's a pleasure to rise on the 162 “not getting it done” bill. I'm going to start on something I've been talking about all afternoon because I think it's important. I think it's an important one to talk about because when this bill was introduced, they had a big press conference, Madam Speaker. I think you remember it. Remember, they had a big press conference about this bill? And what was the headline on CP24 and CFTO? All the headlines were very clear. It was, “They're not going to take any more tolls on our highways.” And everybody went, “Oh, yes. Oh, yes.” And then it came out that we don't have any tolls right now except one, which they never discussed at the press conference. We know the 407, and we can have the discussion about the—I could talk for hours on the 407 and what happened there when Harris

was in. He wanted to balance the budget, so he said, “Well, I've got to find a way to balance the budget. I've got to get elected,” so he sold off the 407 for next to nothing. I'm not saying it was nothing. I don't know the exact amount. It might have been a couple of million dollars. It's now worth a billion dollars or more, so somebody's made some good profit on that. But they took that money to say they balanced the budget.

But they now have the 407 east, which isn't owned by an international company on the other side of the world. It's actually owned by the province of Ontario, who still wants to charge the tolls on the 407 east. I had this conversation with my colleague from Oshawa, a very, very good—I think she's a great NDP MPP. We had this conversation, and then she told me something interesting. She told me that in her community, the Durham council—which, by the way, and I find this interesting: I believe there's five MPPs on that side of the House. Not one of you has raised this issue today, quite frankly. Not one of you has said, “No, you know what? Maybe we made a mistake. We should take the tolls off.”

But she raised it with me. But the council wants it. So it isn't the member from Oshawa. It's not Wayne Gates, the member from Niagara Falls, representing Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie, of course. It is actually the council of that area. And the reason why they're so upset is they say you're punishing the people that live in the Oshawa-Durham area because they're the ones that travel the 407 east more than anybody.

I thought, you know what? To the member from Oshawa: It was brilliant—because she raised it. I've said this before. Madam Speaker, you know when I was watching this? It was about 1:30 in the morning—showing you how I can't sleep at night—so I thought I'll watch the Parliament station. Well, in this particular case, it was a good idea because I heard it and then I went directly to the member and I said, “This doesn't sound right.” So I started reading the bill. I was amazed. It's in the bill. Nobody can stand up and say I'm not talking to the bill right now, because it's in the bill.

So I'm saying to my colleagues, I hope when you stand up, you say, “You know what? This sounds fair and reasonable. We shouldn't be attacking the people from Oshawa, where, by the way, we have a number of our members, our MPPs. We're going to listen to that council and we're going to agree with an NDP amendment to take the tolls off the 407 east part.” I think that would work out really well.

Then, the other thing that has been suggested by the NDP which I think, “You know what? I didn't think of it. I wish I did”—I would have probably done a video on it, because I have a lot of trucks. I live in a border town. I know you've been to my town quite a few times. I've seen you down there. You guys enjoyed it. Actually, I think you guys were there just a little while ago. I waited by the phone for days thinking you'd call me to go out for dinner. Nobody called me. Go for a glass of wine, go for things, take you on a tour—nothing. None of that happened, unfortunately. I was ready, though. I just want my col-

leagues to know, if you come to Niagara, I'm more than willing to take you out and show you a good time. I'll leave it at that. I'm not going any further than that, Madam Speaker.

But I want to say, another thing that I think we could do collectively is take the tolls on trucks going down the 407. Let the trucks use the 407 to clear up the congestion. Because I heard how everybody cares about the environment, although you never talk about the greenbelt and some of the stuff you did there, so I thought that would be a very good idea. I'm hoping that you guys decide to reduce the congestion and take care of it.

On schedule 1, Environmental Assessment Act—we had a lot of conversation about the 413. Madam Speaker, did you hear that mentioned a few times today from some of my colleagues? Well, the problem with the 413 is you're going to save 30 seconds. That's what you're going to save. We can argue whether it's 30 seconds or 30 minutes, but it's 30 seconds. It might be a minute if you drive slower.

But here's the problem with the 413. And it's a problem that we faced during COVID. How many remember COVID when we had the COVID outbreak, and because we didn't have any PPE, we didn't have any resources and gloves and aprons because we were relying on places like China? Even our biggest trading partner, the United States, wouldn't give us PPE. Do you remember that, Madam Speaker? Remember those times?

1750

Well, here's what's happening with the 413. Never mind about the assessment that they don't want to do—and they're arguing with the federal government. It would take me another 20 minutes to have that debate. But what I do know is, we're losing 319 acres of prime farmland every single day in the province of Ontario and a lot of it, quite frankly, is around the 413, up in that area.

I come from an area with a lot of agriculture. There was a big article in the paper that climate change is going to have a big effect on the fruits and vegetables in the Niagara region. But what I want to say to my colleagues—I know some are listening; I know my buddy in the corner always listens. Some others are talking. But I want to say what's important and why I want to raise this is that if we cannot feed ourselves, if we've got to rely on China, Mexico, Jamaica and some of these other countries and we can't feed ourselves and they get into the same problem we're getting in with climate change, they are going to take care of their own. They're going to feed their own and, quite frankly, they should, just like we should.

So I'm saying to your government, take another look at the 413. Do not destroy any more farmland—not just for ourselves, because a lot of us, as I look around this chamber, are older, like myself, but we need it for our kids and our grandkids to make sure they're going to be able to have food, nutritious food. I think it's important. That's in the schedule, and I'm trying to make sure that—because I've got a speech, by the way. I've got a speech here, but I might not get to it because I'm trying to stay on my notes.

I don't think my speech probably was completely on the issue.

I want to talk about the carbon tax just for a minute. I'm going to read this in my notes. The Ontario NDP—now, I want my colleagues to listen to this because I know the other 60 people that are elected are just glued to their TV right now at 20 minutes to 6 or whatever time it is. The Ontario NDP has never supported a provincial carbon tax on regular consumers, but we have supported a cap-and-trade system focused on making large emitters pay. The only reason—this is important for my colleagues, and you guys should go back to your ridings and when you knock on the door, this is what I'd like you to say to them, because now you know the real story around the NDP, that we actually want the emitters to pay.

The only reason Ontario has a carbon tax is because the Ford government cancelled the cap-and-trade system whose costs were much lower than the federal carbon tax that replaced it, and you guys didn't replace it with anything, and then the federal Liberals put it onto the province. If you just would have done the cap-and-trade instead of forcing consumers to pay, you would have had the big corporations that are destroying our environment paying instead of everybody else.

I think that's important, and this is all accurate, by the way.

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I know I can't—I don't know the riding that the one person is screaming at me about, but everything I'm talking about is absolutely the truth, and I'm going to say that.

I've only got a minute left, and I know everybody's happy about that because I was hoping for 20 minutes, but here's what the Conservatives could have put in this bill that I and my colleagues could have supported. How about ending deeming for injured workers? Why isn't that in the bill? How about passing paid sick days? Because people get sick. Why not make sure that we tackle the price gouging? Why not talk about Loblaws and some of those others that are making record profits as people just down the street here—just down the street, somebody died on the street last week. That's the second one in about six weeks in the richest province, the richest country in the world, yet our CEOs are making record profits, our companies are making record profits as people are starving and have to go to food banks. Thank you very much for that last minute that wasn't—

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

I recognize the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I thank the member opposite for his remarks. I always appreciate listening to him. In fact, his area makes me draw back to earlier in my life when I was a rebar bender at the Stoney Creek plant of Harris Steel back when—so a connection on labour and one very small part for me.

Anyway, I noted his remarks on the tolls and I noted his reaction that—observing there was very strong, positive press from that announcement, and we were pleased with that. And that shows that the folks out there who—pleased to hear confirmation there are no tolls on—whether it's the QEW down to Niagara, Don Valley Parkway or other highways.

So won't the member support us in this confirmation of no new tolls on these—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Niagara Falls for a response.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I played a lot of slo-pitch up in Stoney Creek. And I used to go to the Attic, which had the best pizza in the province of Ontario. So I remember Stoney Creek well.

On the tolls: The reason why I mentioned about the press—because it was misleading; it wasn't accurate, because we are still going to charge people tolls. If you really care about affordability and you care about the people in Oshawa and Durham region, and you care about that council that was extremely serious the other morning when they had their council meeting, take the tolls off the 407 east. That's why I'm saying it. When you did your press conference, you got all kinds—and that's great. That's what you want when you put a bill forward. But don't mislead people, and certainly don't get the councils across the province of Ontario upset. Take the tolls off the 407 east. That's when I may even decide to support you.

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

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you so much to the member from Niagara Falls. It's always entertaining when you get up and tell it like it is. I really appreciate that.

Let's just go back to this government wanting to save people money. They want to put money in people's pockets. But they will not come clean on the fact that they have a carbon tax. It's called the emissions performance standard, that you've imposed on large industries, and I did hear the member from Mississauga—Streetsville say that they're just going to pass it down to the consumers. Yes, that's exactly what you have. That's your plan that exists now. Look it up. It's a line in your consolidated finances, in the finances of the province of Ontario. And you are going to collect billions and billions of dollars on that emissions performance standard, also known as a carbon tax.

What could this province be doing with the billions of dollars that they are currently collecting on a carbon tax for the people of Ontario?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much for the question. Actually, it's nice to see you have the passion, as well, to talk about that.

The issue is that we should want to protect our environment, and that's why the NDP has been very clear—and I said this over and over, although you guys might not be listening to me. It is late Thursday afternoon, and maybe you're saying, "Finally, finally, we're just about done for the week."

I'm telling you: The cap-and-trade is what the NDP has supported. And why have we supported it? It was because the polluters were going to pay. What you've done is, with the carbon tax, you guys have supported it—through the Liberals, that were now going to every resident in the province of Ontario and charging them. Why don't you want to charge the emitters that are causing the environmental crisis that we're facing today? It makes absolutely no sense to me. And yet, you stand up day after day after day, not talking about cap-and-trade and making the big corporations that are killing our environment, not only here in Ontario but right across the country—why shouldn't they be paying?

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I appreciated the comments from my colleague the member for Niagara.

He talked about the fact that one of the schedules in this bill, schedule 3, reverses changes to official plans, urban boundaries, that had been forced on municipalities by this government and were later reversed. So it un-reverses a reversal that had been put in place by this government.

That was not the only reversal that we have seen in this Legislature. A number of bills have been reversed.

I wondered if the member would like to comment on this government's track record of introducing—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member from Niagara Falls for a final response.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that, but I'll tell you what I want to do with my last minute. You want to save the environment? Build more two-way GO all the way to Niagara. Currently now, we have a partial one. Let's have all-way, two-way GO all the way to Niagara. Let's reduce wait times in our hospitals. Let's make sure that we support and get rid of anti-scab legislation. We know today that there are strikes up north in the Timmins area where they're using scabs instead of getting back to the bargaining table and negotiating a fair collective agreement for those workers and their families and their community. There's so much more we could do—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I apologize. I have to interrupt the member. I apologize to the member, but it is now 6 o'clock and time for private members' public business.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Report continues in volume B.

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Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
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Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

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Gallagher Murphy, Dawn (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hazell, Andrea (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Jama, Sarah (IND)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	
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		Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre
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		Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
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Leardi, Anthony (PC)	Essex	
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Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean	
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
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Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Hon. / L'hon. Todd J. (PC)	Durham	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
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McGregor, Graham (PC)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
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Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
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Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
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Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
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Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
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Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Vacant	Milton	