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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

F-43

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des débats
(Hansard)**

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**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

COVID-19 study

1st Session
42nd Parliament
Thursday 30 July 2020

**Comité permanent
des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Étude sur la COVID-19

1^{re} session
42^e législature
Jeudi 30 juillet 2020

Chair: Amarjot Sandhu
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : Amarjot Sandhu
Greffière : Julia Douglas

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Thursday 30 July 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Jeudi 30 juillet 2020

The committee met at 0900 in room 151 and by video conference.

COVID-19 STUDY

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order. We'll be meeting for hearings on the infrastructure sector for the study of the recommendations relating to the Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020, and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on certain sectors of the economy.

We have the following members in the room: MPP French and MPP Crawford. The following members are participating remotely: MPP Mamakwa, MPP Roberts, MPP Schreiner, MPP Skelly, MPP Smith, MPP Piccini, MPP Blais, MPP Rasheed, MPP Monteith-Farrell, MPP Martin, MPP Burch, MPP Bourgouin.

MPP Hunter, can you please confirm your attendance?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It's MPP Hunter, and I'm in Toronto.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Did I miss any of the members?

We are also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, interpretation and broadcast and recording.

To make sure that everyone can understand what is going on, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Are there any questions before we begin?

MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will now call on the Honourable Laurie Scott, Minister of Infrastructure. You will have 15 minutes for your presentation, followed by 45 minutes of questions from the members of the committee. The questions will be divided into two rotations of seven minutes and 30 seconds for each of the government, the official opposition and the independent members as a group. I will give reminders of the time remaining during the presentation and the questions.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thank you for the opportunity to present today on such a beautiful summer day that we're having.

Before I begin, I would like to personally thank the staff at my ministry and all those who have risen to the many challenges we have faced during these past few months.

I want to start by touching on the broader impacts of COVID-19 on the infrastructure sector and then talk about what we are doing to help meet the critical needs of Ontarians that the pandemic has brought to the forefront.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the urgent need to accelerate key infrastructure projects. At the same time, municipalities and other stakeholders in the infrastructure sector were among the hardest-hit with the initial shut-down. We are now faced with a new, challenging environment in which decisions about infrastructure priorities have to be made. We must consider how investments can address the needs identified by the pandemic, while weighing the support that these investments will provide for economic recovery.

Let's remember: Ontario committed over \$144 billion over 10 years to making historic infrastructure investments across the province. I'm proud to say that from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, my ministry has remained focused on the future, demonstrating our commitment.

We have been engaging with our municipal and infrastructure sector partners, reaffirming our commitment to the delivery of strategic infrastructure programs. This means continuing to support municipalities through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program and the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, known as OCIF, and providing smaller municipalities with expert asset management advice, planning and action plans.

It also means affirming the government's commitment to the more than \$60 billion worth of investments highlighted in our P3 project pipeline, released in June. And it means transforming how we procure infrastructure so we can get projects built faster and safer. These efforts will connect people to jobs, help businesses adapt to the new environment and support economic recovery.

But there is another area I want to focus on today. Throughout the pandemic, we have all witnessed a striking juxtaposition, and that is how the need for physical distancing has highlighted the need for a digital connection—so I hope I don't fade out. The most glaring gap in connecting Ontario, which COVID-19 has magnified, is the province's digital divide.

Too many people in our province lack reliable Internet or cellular access, or don't have any connectivity at all. It is estimated that up to 12% of Ontarians, or approximately 1.4 million people, mostly living in rural, remote and northern areas, are in need of better service. That would be

like nobody having broadband in Windsor, St. Catharines, Niagara, Barrie, Guelph, Kingston, Kanata, Milton, Brantford, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Peterborough and Sarnia combined. And the speed, quality and experience vary significantly across the province.

Now, more than ever, people need reliable broadband so they can easily work, learn and connect with friends and family. This means being able to quickly send an email, check our cellphones for directions or enjoy an online video chat with friends and family. Students need to be connected to do homework assignments or take a university course online. The hard-working people of Ontario need to be able to easily and immediately access digital resources on the go or to work remotely. Families want to stream video to their living rooms, pay bills with the click of a mouse and securely receive medical test results. For businesses across all sectors, whether it is manufacturing, agriculture or e-commerce, they all depend on fast, reliable connections. And as we have seen, the virtual delivery of health and justice are two sectors also being transformed during the pandemic.

Broadband is a federally regulated sector. The federal government is responsible for properly funding broadband not just here in Ontario, but across Canada. It is the telecommunications sector that provides services—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Ten minutes.

Hon. Laurie Scott:—and Ontario, along with the federal government and municipal partners, has a role to play. As a result of this, over the past year, Ontario has begun to fill the gaps and made significant strides in its ongoing commitment to invest in broadband.

One year ago, Ontario launched Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan. This \$315-million plan has the potential to leverage up to \$1 billion in partner funding for broadband infrastructure investments. As part of this plan, we have been taking action across Ontario.

Last fall, Ontario announced a joint investment of \$69 million with Canada in the Matawa project supporting First Nations in the Ring of Fire in Ontario's Far North. There have been other northern projects through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund that are providing broadband to rural and remote communities in northern Ontario.

In southwestern Ontario, the province is investing in a Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology, or SWIFT, project to leverage up to \$190 million with partner funding. This project will bring high-speed broadband to 50,000 more homes and businesses across southwestern Ontario. SWIFT has now awarded contracts in Lambton, Wellington and Norfolk. More contracts are expected to be awarded for additional counties across southwestern Ontario. This includes Oxford, Simcoe, Dufferin, Brant, Essex, Middlesex, Bruce, Huron, Grey, Perth and Elgin counties, and the town of Caledon, Waterloo region and Niagara region.

In addition, over the past several months, Ontario has partnered with the Eastern Ontario Regional Network, known as EORN, to leverage up to \$213 million with partner funding to improve access in eastern Ontario.

We continue to widen our scope. On June 3, I joined the Premier to announce the \$150-million Improving Connectivity for Ontario program, known as ICON. When leveraged with partner funding, ICON has the potential to result in up to \$500 million in broadband projects in areas of need across Ontario.

0910

We committed to opening up an intake for ICON projects this summer. In July, the first intake was opened, as promised, to telecommunication service providers, municipalities, Indigenous communities and non-profits. ICON aims to support approved projects as early as 2021. So in less than a year, we have taken a strong step forward, rolling out \$315 million worth of broadband investments.

Now I ask you, are these actions enough? No. Will we do more? Yes.

I want to take a few minutes to share stories from people who have written to me from across Ontario about their broadband frustrations. I think it's important to provide real examples to illustrate what people are experiencing.

In the town of Erin, in Wellington county, a couple has found working from home due to COVID-19 difficult, with their Internet signal too weak at times to transmit files. The couple also said that their Internet cut out during their son's online university exam.

Another resident in Centre Wellington remembers getting dial-up Internet in the late 1980s and said that not much has changed since then.

Meanwhile, in Red Lake, in northwestern Ontario, near the Manitoba border, a resident described his challenges trying to participate in daily video calls for work.

And in eastern Ontario, a small business owner just outside of Ottawa asked when she will have the Internet speed she needs to sell her products online.

I'm sure many of you have heard similar stories from Ontarians. I certainly understand people's frustrations. I live in a rural area and have experienced some of these difficulties—hopefully not this morning. There is nothing I want more than to see more these challenges addressed.

We are working as fast as we can, but it's a journey we cannot take without our federal partners. We believe that government can be the catalyst for getting reliable, affordable broadband and cellular service across the province. We will bring together private sector telecommunications partners and other levels of government to find solutions that work. This will allow us to leverage taxpayer dollars responsibly for investments in communities that need it the most. And as our province continues to safely and gradually reopen, we are supporting our economic recovery efforts by continuing to expand broadband and cellular service across the province. We know there is more work to do, but through these investments we are continuing to bridge the digital divide and improve the quality of life for all Ontarians. We cannot do it alone, which is why we are counting on our government and our industry partners.

We already knew this had to be an ongoing initiative, but the COVID-19 outbreak reinforced even more the need to improve access to reliable broadband and cellular service, as more people work and learn from home in order

to practise physical distancing. By making these investments, we will help to ensure that every region in the province can participate in the modern digital economy and contribute to Ontario's economic recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to create significant hardship for individuals, families and businesses. As I mentioned earlier, the Ministry of Infrastructure remains committed to making historic infrastructure investments across the province. Time is of the essence. This is about getting shovels moving with critical infrastructure to support economic recovery and job creation. That is why, across the province this summer, we are jump-starting local economies, addressing critical infrastructure and creating jobs through local investments.

Through the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, we have already confirmed \$1.09 billion worth of investments from Ontario for transit projects for over 60 municipalities from outside and inside—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Hon. Laurie Scott: —the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, and we have announced 104 rural and northern projects with a provincial commitment of more than \$80 million. These announcements confirm our shared investment in accessibility and reliability of public transit systems, improving quality of life for residents. For example, in the city of Peterborough, Ontario is committing over \$2.6 million for the purchase of new buses to facilitate the expansion of new transit service, under the public transit stream.

We are also investing in shovel-ready projects that will improve road, bridge, air and marine infrastructure in rural and northern communities, increasing Ontarians' connections with each other and to critical services. In the township of Pickle Lake, we're investing over \$1 million to widen the community's main road and connect their airport to the main highway, through the rural and northern stream. We have recently nominated 76 projects under the green stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, and we will continue to encourage the federal government to streamline project approvals.

We are committed to supporting as many infrastructure projects as possible, to support economic recovery and help our communities thrive. Together, everyone here today—and working with the best minds in our collective fields and sectors, we can support Ontario's recovery from COVID-19.

I welcome your questions and concerns, but more importantly, I welcome your ideas on how we can come together out of this stronger.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start the first round of questions with the opposition side. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Good morning, Minister.

Hon. Laurie Scott: Good morning, Jennifer.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It's nice to see you, screen to screen.

Obviously, there's a lot of conversation about the need for Internet and broadband, and you have highlighted

some of the challenges. I know we're all hearing about those challenges across the province.

According to the FAO report, where they were giving some of the spending breakdown, the government didn't spend any of that almost \$32 million in their broadband infrastructure budget. Can you explain that?

Hon. Laurie Scott: There's no question, with the spending, it all depends on many factors. We have rolled out, as I said, the \$315-million Up to Speed—the broadband and cellular action plan. You are going to see more projects completed, but it depends on the partners, the municipalities and the telecommunications providers that are connected.

In southwest Ontario, they have had investments, and I mentioned some of the communities. I'll just try to find them again.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, that's okay. We've all got examples.

Hon. Laurie Scott: And then EORN has done the cell gap analysis, which comes close to your riding, but not quite. It has made great progress, and it will continue to. What I'm hearing from the providers is that they are trying to do things as quickly as possible.

With consultation with municipalities and with the telecommunications providers, it's a matter of rollout, planning, construction. It can go by weather, for example. In Matawa, I believe that they have the funding; they have, I think, five projects in the works already. EORN is well on its way for the cell gap, and in southwestern Ontario—I mentioned many regions, but—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Minister, I'm going to interrupt you, with all due respect. Thank you.

So it's a matter of the partner? It depends on the partner funding rather than what was actually budgeted, so that \$31.8 million—

Hon. Laurie Scott: Yes. Without doubt, the budget stays there. The commitment is still there. With that, you have to keep in mind—and I think I mentioned it in the comments—that the \$315-million Up to Speed will partner with about a billion dollars' worth of investment.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The partner thing, I think, is something for all of us to be watching and doing our best to understand and ensure that public money does get spent—because the breakdown for the FAO report does point out that it was \$65 million under budget for hospitals, long-term-care homes and community programs, and \$314 million under budget for hospital infrastructure projects. Depending on partners versus what's actually budgeted, it's hard—frankly, it's becoming challenging to watch the numbers. We will, I guess, watch the shovels and keep learning.

Hon. Laurie Scott: The commitment there is definitely the \$144 billion in infrastructure over 10 years. That is a very strong commitment that we reiterate all the time. We certainly have seen, with COVID-19—we're watching that and working with our construction partners very closely. We did an update for the pipeline in June, with our commitment to building that infrastructure.

You did see, in some of the health care sectors, an actual increase. I believe Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital was

accelerated. That build was actually completed earlier during COVID-19.

So as you see the factors that come into play, the commitment never changes, the monies stay there and the investments are being made.

0920

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

Infrastructure Ontario did report that many of the projects in that procurement pipeline have been delayed by months, if not years, with the financial close being pushed further and further into the future. I appreciate what you said about the need to do things now and, as we look at recovery, what that strong future could look like.

Can you speak a bit about why we're not investing right now in things like child care, education, long-term care, staffing, all of that? We are spending a lot of time talking about these projects, and when we're seeing that they're being pushed further and further, how on earth is that going to support the municipalities who need the shovels now and need the funding now and need the approvals now?

Hon. Laurie Scott: You've just seen two announcements for rapid-response builds for long-term care that have happened in the Mississauga region, and you've seen it happen in your region, in Durham, just this week. That's an incredible commitment to working with municipalities—because they're going to have to be involved—and working with health. They're hospital lands, to build—in Durham the other day, 320 beds there. You saw two 320 beds announced in the Mississauga region. You've also seen the fact that the commitment to those, the accelerated builds that you saw, not only in the hospital example—I used Mackenzie Vaughan; there are other ones that I can cite.

There is no question that we're committed to the pipeline. We're working with all the partners—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Hon. Laurie Scott: —I mean, health and long-term care.

The rapid-response builds are very new. Infrastructure Ontario assists the long-term-care ministry in making those builds.

We are building as quickly as possible and working with our partners in relation to that.

I don't know if the deputy wants to jump in with some more detailed information. Deputy Giannikos is there to give you some more.

Mr. Chris Giannikos: I just want to reinforce the minister's point about the complexity of getting this build on the ground. The only thing I'd like to add is the complexity added by the COVID-19 situation, which as you may know has impacted the productivity on construction sites. So it is taking a little longer to be able to get a lot of these things built. But as far as—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll come back to that in the second round.

We'll have to move to the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

I wanted to ask about the FAO report that was tabled this week. It noted \$314 million in health capital funding that was not spent. Do you know why that is? It was specifically for capital infrastructure for hospitals.

Hon. Laurie Scott: I mentioned some of the reasons, which I think the deputy was almost going to answer. Maybe we should let him finish on his part of the question.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Sure.

Hon. Laurie Scott: It depends on very many things—construction seasons. There could be something with utility relocations.

I'm going to let the deputy finish answering that question, if you don't mind. He was on a roll.

Mr. Chris Giannikos: I just would like to remind the committee that what you're seeing is basically a re-profiling of investments. We have to keep in mind that these are multi-year projects, and as a result of the factors that the minister has spoken to and some of the delays as a result of the COVID-19 situation, these funds are being re-profiled into other years. So it is not a reduction in funding; it is basically re-profiling to take into account what the various construction sites have run into. So it is all about making sure that we can build as fast as we can, but the situation currently has resulted in some delays because of the impacts on construction sites and within buildings, as well. As you can imagine, social distancing has reduced the number of, for example, construction workers who can actually be on the site. There are fewer people on construction sites, and therefore it takes a little longer to be able to do these projects. As a result, you have to re-profile and re-forecast the spending.

The spending, as the minister pointed out, is a significant amount, \$144 billion over 10 years. When you see a reduction in one year, it's basically being re-profiled to the other years.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I do note that the construction and infrastructure projects were seen as priorities during the emergency and did not stop. We did keep those going, which was important.

I do have hospital projects in my riding and area. I know that just yesterday the Premier jumped on a Scarborough Business Association call which was being held with Minister Phillips and committed very strongly to the community investments in hospital infrastructure. The Scarborough Health Network has been in the queue for quite some time in terms of capital. One of the hospitals in Scarborough is actually amongst the bottom of the list when it comes to state of repair and facility condition, and our other hospital has operating rooms that—I think they were built in the 1960s, and they just haven't changed. So we very much want to see those projects that have been on the list and the funding flowing clearly where it is still set aside so that we can move forward.

Minister, for my question, I want to just change gears a little bit. You talked about those most impacted. We know

that those most impacted by the pandemic in terms of lost jobs and slower return are women.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm wondering what your ministry is doing—or would you be willing to apply a gender lens to the recovery, as infrastructure will be a big part of the economic recovery?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Minister McNaughton in labour and training and skills development, and I know Jill Dunlop out of her ministry, looking after women's issues—certainly, there's no question. I have a record of about 15 years of promoting more women into good-paying jobs.

If I can speak, because we're in infrastructure—there are women in construction organizations that we promote and highlight and try to get to mentor more women, and in training programs, actually, have women in those classrooms to do the training.

Absolutely, I think jobs within infrastructure, in construction, should be more targeted to women, and those programs do exist. I know Minister McNaughton and Minister Dunlop are big promoters of that. As I said, for 15 years, I've been promoting women to get into non-traditional trades. These are jobs that are going to be available. We have the most aggressive pipeline in the province's history, of \$144 billion. We so need skilled trades.

I'm a big proponent of getting into the schools. I think our Premier and our Minister of Education have made that a priority—attracting our young people into skilled trades, getting them the training that they need. COVID-19 slowed down those training centres a little bit, but we're on the mark to try to promote more women to get into the trades. As I said, for 15 years, I have done that, and I believe there's a huge role for women to play in infrastructure.

0930

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you for that answer.

I would expect that part of the \$140 billion over 10 years is also set forward for that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'll yield the rest of my time to MPP Blais.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Just to continue on the thought that COVID-19 was the cause of the delay in some infrastructure that's falling through the ground: The FAO report is for the Q4 of 2019 and 2020, and COVID-19 didn't start, in terms of having an impact, until middle to late March. So how was \$314 million in health capital spending affected by two weeks of COVID-19 in March?

Hon. Laurie Scott: As the deputy has said, and I have said too, there are certainly other factors that come into play that make some spending high in some years—and some underspending in other years. Those things usually work out. I'll let the deputy, in the short other seconds—if he wants to explain that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Minister, I apologize; we are out of time.

We have to move to the government side now. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you for your presentation, Minister Scott. It's certainly an honour, and I'm grateful to serve with you and your ministry. I see a few of our deputies here, and it's great to see them as well. I'm proud to serve with a minister who truly cares about infrastructure and the people of Ontario.

I'm sure I speak for everyone in this room and on this call when I say that 2020 has been a very difficult and unusual year for all of us. When I first learned of the coronavirus, like many others, obviously, I was deeply concerned. I was concerned about how to keep my family safe and healthy, concerned about the rest of the world, concerned about the pandemic and how the virus will affect the future of Ontario. Many of us have been forced to stay home in order to stay safe and healthy. Businesses have had to close their doors temporarily; in some cases, even permanently. In my own house, I'm sure like everybody on this call, my kitchen serves as my office and also a school. We've really changed our habits and our way of life.

Fortunately, throughout all of these changes, I have been able to stay connected to my family and business through texting, emails etc. But I know not everyone in Ontario has this kind of luxury in terms of being that fortunate, to have that kind of access. When I travel just 30 minutes outside of my riding of Oakville, sometimes I begin to have connectivity issues. I've lost my GPS signal. I've been on calls with colleagues where I've had drops right in the middle of the calls. All of this is because of poor broadband service and cellular connectivity across this province, which we know has created a digital divide, rural versus urban—which has been exacerbated, I think, by COVID-19. COVID-19 has really put a spotlight on that.

For years, I've heard my colleagues in the Legislature discuss the need and call for improved broadband connectivity in Ontario. This is not just a result of the pandemic. This is something that's been systemic here before. Many Ontarians experience unreliable broadband connectivity, and this is not unique to just a few communities. I know you touched on that earlier in your presentation, Minister Scott.

Minister Scott, would you be able to share with the committee exactly how many people in Ontario do not have adequate access to broadband in Ontario?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thank you, PA Crawford, for your kind words. It is a pleasure to serve the people of Ontario with you.

Your comments are right on point. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the digital divide to the forefront. Without adequate Internet access, you can't stay connected to your loved ones, you can't access vital government services, and you can't work and learn from the safety of your home.

As someone who—I've mentioned it here today several times—represents and lives in rural Ontario, I experience this daily. Certainly, I'm enjoying working from home, but

some days it's challenging. I want to stay on top of these issues; you know I'm very passionate about this. When you asked the question about the amount of people without reliable Internet, the answer is quite simple, and that's way too many.

I know we've all got to be hearing these stories from our ridings. Too many people have been left out of the modern world we live in now. Many of these residents have a very difficult time doing simple tasks like accessing attachments for work, streaming videos and connecting with their families. In some cases, even opening a homework assignment or sending an email becomes a challenge.

Interestingly, this problem is not unique to Ontario. Other provinces and jurisdictions in the United States have also reported experiencing unreliable broadband connectivity in rural regions.

As the Minister of Infrastructure, my focus is on ensuring that everyone in Ontario can access the digital 21st-century economy. That's why, last summer, we announced our five-year broadband and cellular action plan, Up to Speed, investing \$315 million, in collaboration with the private sector and other partner funding.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Hon. Laurie Scott: That generation of up to \$1 billion over the next five years is going to expand access to at least 220,000 homes and businesses in rural communities.

We can't do it alone. We need our federal counterparts to join us and properly fund broadband expansion.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you for the response, Minister. It's interesting to hear how the digital divide has affected your ability to get work done during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As PA, I've had the pleasure first-hand to see the way in which our government is working together with the federal government, municipalities, community groups, Indigenous groups and private sector organizations to ensure that Ontarians have more access to broadband. For example, you mentioned that Ontario has stepped up and delivered on its commitment for \$315 million to projects that will improve connectivity to the people of Ontario.

Last month, I was excited to hear about the \$150-million funding program called ICON that will provide funding to municipalities and other partners to get better access to broadband.

But, Minister, we often hear you say that the funding isn't enough and there's more work to do. Support from the federal government, especially, I believe is absolutely key to lead this initiative.

Minister Scott, would you please tell us what it will take to close the digital divide?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thank you again, PA Crawford, for the question.

Let me begin by explaining that broadband is a federal-regulated sector, with its agency, the CRTC, responsible for establishing countrywide standards for Internet and cellular connectivity. This is the reason why we are calling on the federal government to do its part and properly fund broadband. The federal Minister of Rural Economic

Development has promised the sector a nearly \$1.7-billion funding program called the Universal Broadband Fund, and yet not a cent has been flowed to the provinces from that federal fund.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Hon. Laurie Scott: Ontario can't wait, as the digital divide worsens. That's why we stepped up to the plate, delivering on our commitment to bring funding-based opportunities. Our five-year broadband and cellular action plan, Up to Speed, is investing \$315 million, in collaboration with our partners, to leverage up to \$1 billion in total investment over the next five years. I've mentioned that \$71 million with EORN, \$63.7 million to the SWIFT project and the \$115 million for our new program, ICON—which is to unserved and underserved—are all currently under way.

We know that Ontario has an important part to play. We need other partners, including, as I said, the federal government, telecommunications service providers and municipalities, to lend their investments and expertise.

We know there's more work to do, but through these investments, we're going to continue to bridge the digital divide and improve the quality of life for all Ontarians.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll start the second round with the independent members now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Minister, thank you for joining us today.

In our last set of presentations, we had a number of municipalities and municipal organizations come and talk about the dire financial situation they're in and the fact that they may not have the funds to commit to the municipal share of infrastructure funding.

Given how important it is to get shovels in the ground, will the province commit to covering the municipal share of infrastructure funding so that many of these projects can move forward?

Hon. Laurie Scott: We keep in constant contact with our municipalities, Mike. There are several streams in which IO is partnering with the municipalities and the federal government. Since COVID-19, we've been engaged with—I've spoken to AMO several times, the MOU table, and certainly lots of municipalities. Our commitment is to maintaining stability and predictability in the infrastructure sector. That's why our primary focus has been to make sure that those investments are made quickly so that we can help our municipal partners and our Indigenous partners move from shovel-ready to shovels moving.

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When you're talking about the ICIP, or the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program—last summer, we did nominate over 350 projects to the federal government for funding approval. Since June, we've joined the federal government and our municipal and First Nations partners to announce the long-awaited approvals for these projects in over 50 communities. Shovels are getting in the ground and projects are getting built. We certainly continue to work with the federal government on that program, to

streamline and to speed up some of those approvals so that municipalities can get going. We have spoken to many, Mike. A lot of them, especially in some of our streams, are still very much willing partners and had some money set aside.

You know that the federal government, along with the provincial government, announced the Safe Restart Agreement, which is billions of dollars—\$4 billion—for municipalities, to give them assistance. I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Minister Clark, is working with those municipalities about distribution to try to give them the hand they need in this COVID-19 time.

We've also seen OCIF, the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, which MOI oversees. Those help small, rural and northern communities build the critical infrastructure. We did provide the \$200 million allocated in funding to the 424 municipalities, giving them the flexibility to meet their infrastructure needs. With that, I'm just going to see if I can pull up some figures—but there have been so many municipalities that have benefited from that, and we work with them constantly to make sure how things are going.

Infrastructure Ontario—I know a lot of members might not know this, but the municipalities certainly know: That's a crown agency that allows loan programs where borrowers like municipalities, housing providers and health care providers, including long-term-care homes, can renew and build infrastructure that delivers valuable services to the people of Ontario.

We did, as [*inaudible*]—and you mentioned that change for municipalities. We've granted a deferral for the collection of loan principal and interest payments for those borrowers for up to six months. We're leaving a bit of a pressure valve for these municipalities that had engaged in the Infrastructure Ontario loan program.

We're continuing to roll out projects, work with them and obviously work with the federal government—and I mentioned the Safe Restart Agreement of \$4 billion to help communities.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I think a lot of municipalities will need more than loan forgiveness.

A lot of municipalities are starting to shift some of their infrastructure funding to create more street space for physical distancing. Toronto is doing that. My riding of Guelph is doing that. That's typically not the kind of infrastructure that we oftentimes fund—for walking, cycling, wheeled mobility devices and things like that.

Is the ministry prepared to shift some of its funding into those kinds of infrastructure projects so that businesses can reopen safely?

Hon. Laurie Scott: We're always in communication, and I know Minister Clark is always in communication with the municipalities—and we have the AMO version that's going to be going on. We're going to hear their suggestions, their needs. Like I said, we're in constant contact.

What I hear the most, Mike, from municipalities is about adequate broadband and Internet service. That's the

number one economic thing that I hear that municipalities need so that people can work from home. You probably experienced a little bit in Guelph, too, and some of the outlying areas. There are about 1.4 million people who don't have adequate broadband. That has been the number one ask from municipalities for a long time—the accessibility to broadband. With COVID-19, the digital divide has been glaring. So that has been very much a priority for us, as well as flowing money. But we are always willing to listen to municipalities and the feedback from my colleagues here about some of the challenges that they do face.

As you saw with patio expansions and provincial regulations that have changed—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Hon. Laurie Scott: —we can allow more businesses to expand out to patios. Different types of services are allowed besides takeout, having the advantage of having the liquor and beer, just something to help them expand—I know many more people are going into stage 3 today, so welcome to those who are coming in—to give those businesses opportunities to continue and to succeed. We've had to be very cautious, as you all know. The Premier has been very cautious but very much of the mind that we need to be as flexible as we can, with health and safety in mind, and let those businesses and those municipalities prosper. It's always an ongoing dialogue.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: If there's time, MPP Blais has a question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I'll just return to the question: How was there such a shortfall in spending in the last two weeks of March? If COVID-19 caused all the spending shortfalls, how did that happen in the two weeks at the end of March?

Hon. Laurie Scott: It depends what you're looking at. The projects that Infrastructure Ontario are building are huge, complex projects, and we have made the commitment that the dollars are there. There's always very—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize, Minister.

We have to move to the government side now for their time of questioning. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, all of us, regardless of which part of Ontario we are in, have heard from constituents who are concerned about reliability of broadband service in their riding.

I received an email from Kim in Waterdown, which is part of my riding, and I'd like to share it with you:

"I'm sure you have received many emails in regard to this issue. I live in Waterdown, Ontario, and I have horrible Internet. For example, I was trying to download your website. It took eight minutes. My download speed is 0.54 megabits per second and 0.01 megabits per second in upload speed, and we pay \$179 a month. I've not been able to work from home, and because of that, I may not be able

to go back to work until September or possibly December. It's very frustrating not being able to have this service when a lot of people rely on it."

Minister, my question to you is, when might people like Kim actually receive reliable broadband service?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thank you so much, PA Skelly, for sharing Kim's comments with me.

I want to say to Kim, I understand where you're coming from as, living in a rural area, I have the same difficulties. But know that we do have a plan. Last month, I unveiled our newest \$150-million funding program called Improving Connectivity for Ontario, or ICON. We launched the application intake, which is now open until August 21, 2020. This is just one of the steps we're taking to deliver broadband to more people across Ontario.

While I'm proud that our government has stepped up and delivered \$315 million in funding, it is simply not enough to bring everyone in Ontario up to speed. We can't do it alone. That's why we're calling on the federal government to give Ontario its fair share in broadband funding.

I hope that a year or so from now the challenges Kim and other Ontarians like her face are answered.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Throughout these hearings, we have heard time and time again from people in every sector and families right across Ontario who specifically remind us that broadband is a critical issue in moving forward and beyond COVID-19.

Parents who have converted their dining rooms into classrooms have also reached out to many of us. I'd like to share this particular comment: "My name is Laura, and I live in Douro-Dummer. For the past few months, it's been a struggle for my students to do homework online because of the Internet. Is there any progress in getting high-speed Internet to my area? I'm only 10 minutes from Peterborough. I should be able to get Internet."

Children and parents really do need Internet, not just now, but beyond the pandemic.

My question to you, Minister, is, how will your ministry support families who have to work and learn from home during the pandemic and beyond?

0950

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thank you again, PA Skelly, for this important question.

I couldn't agree more with Laura. Access to reliable broadband connectivity should not be an obstacle in studying, working and connecting with loved ones. This is a concern I have shared conversations with and letters to the federal Minister of Rural Economic Development, since broadband is a federally regulated sector—and this actually happens to be from her riding. Although the federal government has committed nearly \$1.7 billion in funding for broadband expansion across Canada, unfortunately no money has flowed to our province. We can't wait for the federal government to act. That's why we did launch our \$315-million action plan, Up to Speed—named, I thought, quite well.

We know that Ontario has an important role to play, but we are not the only answer. When telecommunications

providers, municipalities and especially the federal government—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Hon. Laurie Scott: We need them to lend their expertise and their investments.

So to Laura in Selwyn: Everyone does have a role to play, Laura, and we are moving as fast as we can.

Thank you, PA Skelly, for the question.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Donna, I'm glad that you're advocating for the folks just north of me in Peterborough and you know where Douro-Dummer is.

Minister, thanks very much. I know infrastructure is key. While there were challenges during COVID-19—a sincere appreciation for seven in Asphodel-Norwood, for getting quick approval for Paudash in Hiawatha First Nation, quick approval for public transit, improved accessibility in Port Hope and Cobourg. I greatly appreciate it. I know it was a year thereafter since we got federal approval, but I'm glad we can get shovels in the ground. So thank you to you and your ministry for the quick work on that.

I'm just going to continue on broadband, Minister. I'm a rural Ontario member, as you know, next door to you. When we're out in the hills of rural Ontario with our Kawartha Dairy ice cream, when folks are working on farms, they've got to connect.

I'm going to share a story from Roseneath, from a young woman who works at Staples, who wrote to me about being laid off. I'll just quickly Coles Notes it: laid off on April 7; fearful about when she gets called back, as she won't be able to work from home.

What are the timelines for fibre optic Internet out in rural communities like Roseneath in Ontario, where I represent?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Thank you very much for that Kawartha Dairy pitch, and thank you, PA Piccini, for your question and sharing your constituent's concerns with me. People across Ontario need to be connected to the modern digital economy through reliable broadband so they can easily work, learn and connect with friends and family. Your constituent's story is one of the many unfortunate consequences that unreliable broadband leaves Ontario with. As someone, as I said, from rural Ontario, again—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Hon. Laurie Scott: —I understand this very well. That's why, as Minister of Infrastructure, I continue to advocate for the needs of Ontarians by calling on the federal government to give our province its fair share in broadband funding.

Luckily, Roseneath is a part of the Eastern Ontario Regional Network's catchment—because our government has already partnered with EORN to leverage \$213 million to improve cellular and broadband connectivity in eastern Ontario.

But, put simply, Ontario can't wait any longer for our federal counterparts to take their seat at the table and get Ontario up to speed. So I welcome the federal government

to join us, and I welcome more investments as quickly as possible.

Mr. David Piccini: I greatly appreciate that. I'm working with my municipalities on ICON submissions. That was greatly appreciated.

Minister, this federal commitment is nice talk, but when can we expect that \$1.7 billion? This is a team effort. Any indication?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize. We are out of time. We'll move to the opposition side now.

Sorry; before we do that, I need to do an attendance check. MPP Cho, if you can please confirm your attendance.

Mr. Stan Cho: I am present and in Toronto.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Morrison?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Present in Toronto.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Questions? MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you, Minister and folks who are on from the ministry. I do have a few questions, and rather than explaining them and getting into the story of them, I would like to be succinct. I'll do my best. I would ask if you could answer them quickly because I do want to give my colleague from Kiiwetinoong a chance to ask questions.

You mentioned the 76 projects that you have approved in the green stream so far. Are there more approvals coming? And beyond that stream, when can municipalities expect to know one way or another about their approvals for ICIP? If they haven't heard good news, does that mean it isn't coming?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Yes, the 76 projects for the green stream, for municipalities and First Nations less than 100,000 and for the most critical infrastructure needs—as you can imagine, all these programs are very over-applied in the green stream. We've worked with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to determine those.

On the CCR stream, yes, the announcements will be coming soon—incredibly over-applied, as in 1,200 applications for almost \$12 billion worth of money, and we only have \$1 billion combined funding.

So yes, those projects are coming.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: So if they haven't heard any—

Hon. Laurie Scott: And it's the second intake for green stream. I'm sorry; I didn't mention that. The second intake for green stream will be launched in the fall.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As critic, I'll reach out and maybe we can chat with the ministry, so that I can help to communicate to municipalities when they should stop waiting by the phone—because there's eagerness there, I think we know.

Hon. Laurie Scott: I think all our ridings are getting that—yes, I know. It was an unbelievable amount of applications, so, sorry, it takes time to go through.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: We both recognize that.

A question about the Halton Region Consolidated Courthouse: What will be the total cancellation costs, including break fees, sunk design and pre-construction costs? If you don't have that specific number now, I'm happy to have that presented to the committee at a later time, in the interests of time.

Hon. Laurie Scott: Those numbers cannot be public at the moment. We're working with the courthouse. I don't know if the deputy wants to add quickly to those—but that is ongoing, and break fees have been discussed.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, if there isn't a definite answer, I won't take the time right now, and we can—

Ms. Laurie Scott: Okay.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you.

Last year, the ministry cut the community hubs program, according to the 2019-20 estimates. Did that loss of funding have anything to do with the end to the Jane and Finch new community centre? Were those connected items?

Hon. Laurie Scott: We have a pipeline with \$144 billion, which is the largest spend in the province's history for infrastructure. There are some applications through the CCR fund that will be coming out shortly—I promise they will be announced shortly—that we have worked with many communities for. With construction delays—these projects are always complex—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Yes.

Hon. Laurie Scott: —but funds are coming through the CCR. The announcements will be soon; I promise. I know it has been a long time—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay.

Hon. Laurie Scott: —but some of those situations will be known soon.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you, Minister. I am sorry to rush you. I know it feels rude and—

Hon. Laurie Scott: And I'm trying to talk quickly.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Maybe you and I can have a longer conversation another time—

Hon. Laurie Scott: Oh, sure.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: —but the format being what it is—how many minutes do I have, please, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Four minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. I'm going to get one more quick one, and then I'm going to throw it over to my colleague in Kiiwetinoong.

Something interesting that we haven't seen before are bid fees, which is an item in the Metrolinx budgets—we haven't seen that in their budgets, but it's in their latest plan. Apparently, over the next two years those bid fees are expected to be nearly \$200 million. Are those related to the cancellation of the Hamilton LRT? What are or will be the total cancellation costs for the Hamilton LRT including, again, break fees, sunk design and pre-construction costs? And if we don't have that number, could I ask for that at a later time?

Hon. Laurie Scott: Again, I don't think we have a specific number, but I can let the deputy jump in with the

process answer for you—if you don't mind, Deputy Giannekos?

Mr. Chris Giannekos: The minister is correct. They're working that through, and that really is the purview of the Minister of Transportation. So we won't comment on the number at this point.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much. I think we did well to leave some time for my colleague from Kiiwetinoong.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for the presentation, Minister Scott.

I have a very unique riding in northwestern Ontario. I have one community where 85% of the homes do not have access to running water. I have another community that has been on a boil-water advisory for 26 years.

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What is your ministry going to do to address these issues? What is your ministry going to do to fund infrastructure on-reserve? I know there's a lot of discussion on broadband, but our people just need clean drinking water.

Hon. Laurie Scott: In the first stream of the green stream under the ICIP, there were 76 projects that were funded.

I'm going to let the deputy jump in here for a minute; he could probably find the number of First Nations that were funded—and those were for communities that were under 100,000, which probably takes in most of your communities.

As I said, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks helps us, when we do the green stream, to do the analysis of the most critical needs—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Hon. Laurie Scott: —and it's based on that. I will let Deputy Giannekos speak to that. I believe there were 40—some of the 76, but Deputy, you might be able to correct me there on the green stream.

Mr. Chris Giannekos: You're absolutely right. The federal programs under ICIP, particularly the green stream, as you point out, have a certain amount of funds set aside for Indigenous communities and the improvement of water and water facilities in Indigenous communities. This is something we partner on with the feds, so the stream has opened up.

I don't have the specifics with respect to how many Indigenous communities we've actually funded—we can certainly get that number for you—but under the program, it is clear that Indigenous communities are provided for, in terms of applying for water-type projects.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time.

Thank you so much, Minister, for appearing before the committee and for your presentation. Have a good day.

We'll move along to our next group of presenters, but before we do that, I need to do an attendance check. MPP West, if you can please confirm your attendance? All right, we'll come back to that.

BRUCE POWER

FIRST NATIONS TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

GRAPE GROWERS OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I would now like to call upon our first witness, Bruce Power. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. James Scongack: My name is James Scongack. I'm the executive vice-president of corporate affairs and operational services for Bruce Power. Thanks very much for having me this morning.

Many of you have visited our facility or are familiar with our site and our industry. For those of you who haven't had the opportunity to visit our facility—obviously, we have a lot of COVID-19 controls in place right now, so we're not opened up to visitors, but when this pandemic is behind us, and it will be behind us some day, consider this an open invitation to visit our facility.

For those of you who don't know, at Bruce Power, we operate the world's largest operating nuclear facility, in rural southwestern Ontario. We're actually home to Canada's largest private sector infrastructure project. Just to orient you geographically, we're located in the counties of Grey, Bruce and Huron. Our facility operates on the traditional territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation. Our facility is actually owned by the province of Ontario, but we have a model where we lease the asset, safely manage the asset and invest in the operation and life extension of the facility.

Overall, we generate about a third of Ontario's electricity from our facility. We're one of the lowest-cost providers of power and electricity in the province of Ontario. Just to put that in perspective, the average cost that a residential user will pay for electricity generated they use is between 12 cents and 13 cents; in this year, we will receive approximately eight cents for that output. We are a large volume of low-cost electricity, and we're able to achieve that because of the volume and the scale of our operation and the longevity of the asset.

Obviously, we're a strategic asset for Ontario and Canada, not only in the supply of electricity—but also a major source of employment, not only in the area our facility is located in, but really across Ontario. There are approximately 25,000 jobs across Ontario that are attributed to our operation, and so it's not just localized in the region where the site is; it expands in communities across the province of Ontario.

Before I get into some items that we'd like to flag for your consideration as part of this committee, there are a couple of other areas of context as they relate to the COVID-19 pandemic that I'd really like to share with the committee today. The first thing is that Ontario's electricity system demonstrated a high degree of reliability during this pandemic. Obviously, a pandemic provides a lot of uncertainty. I have to commend the Independent Electricity System Operator in Ontario, who worked with generators all across Ontario and provided really strong reliability during the pandemic and positioned the electricity sector in a way that it also had that reliability for the

medium term. During the pandemic, we provided over a third of Ontario's electricity.

One of the other areas that we often don't talk a lot about in Ontario—and frankly, I think we need to talk about it more—is, we're the world's largest supplier of a medical isotope called cobalt-60, from our facility at Bruce Power. That's an Ontario industry that exports internationally.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. James Scongack: That particular isotope is used to sterilize personal protective equipment all over the world. We exported enough cobalt-60 to sterilize approximately 24 billion pairs of medical gloves in 2020, so it's a very strategic sector.

In terms of the work that this committee is doing, we've launched a Retooling and Economic Recovery Council. As a company, we provide a million and a half pieces of PPE to businesses and communities across Ontario.

There are two recommendations I want to leave with the committee to think about—the first is that there are a lot of federal policy tools that are available related to infrastructure. In the pre-pandemic period, most of those policy tools were around new infrastructure projects. While Bruce Power is not seeking any federal or provincial government support, we think we have a supply chain that could accelerate a lot of work, enhance the work that we are doing, and we believe that a joint effort between supply chains in Ontario and the Ontario government, with the federal government, is a really critical policy to all.

The other area is the isotope sector in Ontario, especially as it relates to PPE. We view it as a very strategic sector.

I really want to impress upon the committee that when you think of the electricity sector in Ontario—it's not just a sector that generates electricity; it's a sector, in the case of our business, that supplies global isotopes. Now more than ever, the sterilization of medical equipment is very important. That's an area of the economy, from an infrastructure point of view, that we believe we can enhance, build on. It's good for our own self-sufficiency, but it's also good for jobs in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for having me. Members of the committee, I'm happy to answer any questions you may have later.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

Our next presenter is the First Nations Technical Institute. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Suzanne Brant: I'm Suzanne Brant, and I'm the president of the First Nations Technical Institute. I just wanted to share with the committee that the First Nations Technical Institute has been providing post-secondary education to First Nations communities for 35 years. We currently have 4,000 graduates in 102 First Nations communities in Ontario.

With the pandemic, we're currently in a situation where the building that we're occupying cannot house the education. We take our programs into the community. We provide those services directly to those communities so

that they can come into the program and then they can continue to provide their supports to family and community commitments.

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The way that we deliver our programs creates a great success for our students. We have a 93% graduation rate. Because of the traumas and the things that have happened within our communities—we're able to provide those services and supports that ensure their success. Right now, we're looking to really ensure that those programs—in Ontario, of course, they now have the recognition of the Indigenous institutes through the Indigenous Institutes Act. So we've gone through the accreditation process. We are now able to grant our own diplomas, all the way through to degrees. We've created multiple programs that will actually help support the capacity development in our communities and ensure that our students have the strength to contribute back to society in a good way.

We want to ensure that we can have the best success possible and continue our programming. We've designed our new building that is a net-zero building—it's over 50,000 square feet. That will provide not only a beautiful space and a place where people can be proud to say they graduated from, but also a space where we can look at research and innovation. We've developed a new four-year degree program that's around Indigenous food sustainability. We're looking at establishing an incubator where we can look at traditional foods. We also have a full airport where we train pilots, so we've got pilots from across Canada. We want to look at new innovation there, where we can help ensure food security into the communities and look at drone training.

Our institute is very innovative. We have great success rates, and we're able to ensure that the needs of our communities—we're building that capacity to meet those needs.

We also have social work programs. We've developed a new bachelor of Indigenous social work so that the issues that are very directly impacting our communities are being addressed. Our students bring those issues into the classroom, and we're able to actually find solutions to the issues. We've currently developed a new trauma program and trauma care program, and in light of COVID-19, this is going to be very important, again, to help address the needs of our community.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Suzanne Brant: What I would like to leave with you is that right now, as I mentioned, the current facility that we're in is not adequate. There are no ventilation systems. It's never had adequate heating and air conditioning. We've proposed to the government, both federally and provincially, to look at this new net-zero building, and that we want to develop this so that we can continue the research and also these programs that we've developed that are having huge impacts.

Like I said, we have a 93% graduation rate. We have people in the industry. We have an MPP who has graduated from one of our programs; we've had the Regional Chief. The capacity that we're developing is really contributing back to the whole of Ontario. We want to

make sure that we have the space and a place where everyone can work and operate in a healthy environment.

That's all I'd like to leave you with.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to our next presenter, the Grape Growers of Ontario. Please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: Good morning, everyone. I hope you're well. My name is Debbie Zimmerman. I'm the CEO of the Grape Growers of Ontario. Thank you to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for the opportunity to present and participate in the consultation on infrastructure and the impacts of COVID-19—and I'm hoping you're all drinking lots of Ontario wine.

It is with great pleasure I present today about the infrastructure needs of the Grape Growers of Ontario—for over 75 years—and the 500 farm families who represent the growers of the grapes grown in Ontario. I just would point out that Ontario is the largest grape-growing area in Canada. Currently, about 18,000 people are employed in the sector, delivering about \$4.4 billion every year, including \$522 million in tax revenue.

We need investments targeted for Ontario-grown products probably more than ever. Grape growers have made necessary investments to date to help sustain the crop—and I would just mention that a tremendous amount of investments have gone in over the last 25 years for our farmers, particularly in Ontario and particularly with grape growers, to ensure we do produce a crop for Ontario wine.

As everyone knows, COVID-19 has placed tremendous pressure on our farms and our farm families. I believe, and I think that we've heard it from the Premier, Ontario must protect what matters, and what matters is to ensure that we have targeted investments to ensure our farm families, particularly now, remain strong.

Agriculture and the agri-food business has great potential for this province. Agriculture must be targeted to pave the way for future opportunities and the ability for Ontario to prosper. We haven't heard anything anybody else has said, but I think what is important is that point. We need to look no further than our global outlook. Consumers want proof that their food and beverages have been produced in a safe and environmentally sustainable way. Land degradation, water scarcity and urban sprawl make it very difficult for other jurisdictions to compete, but this places Ontario in a very strong position. This strength will be compounded, I hope, with strategic investments in infrastructure and create much-needed jobs.

First, I'd like to ask that we continue to support reliable broadband and cellular network expansion across the rural economy and across rural Ontario.

Second, we should be developing a digital infrastructure strategy in partnership with rural and agricultural stakeholders that would encourage a targeted approach that focuses on the reduction of input costs of, for example, fertilizer application. The strategy must reduce waste and strengthen soil composition, for example; it's

one of the conditions of soil. This will also help improve management practices while lowering costs.

Thirdly, the objectives of the greenbelt recognize the responsibility the greenbelt has to contribute to the economic viability of agriculture. Ontario's greenbelt is a living lung that protects our environment and some of Canada's most important agricultural lands. Agriculture needs improved infrastructure that is resilient to climate change and extreme weather. For example, we continue to need good roads, bridges, green stormwater management, and access to water—in Niagara, that is irrigation.

In order to recover the maximum returns—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: Thank you.

In order to recover the maximum returns for the productive farmland of the region below the escarpment, reliable access to irrigation water is essential. It therefore becomes a great public policy priority to determine the best way to produce that access and to provide funding towards it. Irrigation is encompassed in the greenbelt plan within the agriculture supportive infrastructure. Access to water is essential for the long-term viability and competitiveness of Ontario's tender fruit industry, and is becoming a greater priority due to the more frequent extremes in precipitation and temperature.

In 2017, the Niagara Irrigation Strategic Action Plan was developed. This investment in Niagara's future will protect its farmland, as envisioned by the greenbelt, and enable its stewards—Niagara's farmers—to recover more value from this precious resource and sustain it for future generations.

Finally, infrastructure must invest in our natural areas. These areas must be restored and enhanced areas of natural cover such as wetlands. An enhanced natural area reduces reliance on expensive infrastructure, mitigates the effect of extreme weather, and recognizes the microclimates and soil conditions that create an irreplaceable resource called Niagara.

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Thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to taking your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

We'll start this round of questions with the government side. MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thanks to all the presenters for the presentations. It was really interesting.

I have some questions for Bruce Power and Mr. Scongack. Thank you very much for showing up today.

Electricity is something I think we all take for granted. It's certainly what we would all characterize as an essential and vital service. During the pandemic, it did occur to me that maybe it was something that we should be concerned about and not necessarily take for granted, but as I think you pointed out in your presentation, the IESO did an incredible job just making sure that that electricity was always there. It's one of those things that people don't think about until they turn the lights on or try to run their dishwasher or their laundry machine. We definitely need

to have a stable, reliable supply of electricity available to us. So I want to thank you and Bruce Power for all the great work that they're doing.

I know you talked about some of these things in your presentation, but I thought I would ask you to elaborate a bit more about your role during COVID-19 at Bruce Power. One of the things that you said that really intrigued me was about medical isotope production and the role that Bruce Power has been playing with respect to medical isotope production, which has had an impact on health care not only in Ontario, but all around the world. I'm wondering if you could just elaborate a bit on exactly how that has been working.

Mr. James Scongack: Absolutely. Thanks for your comments and your question.

Overall, we actually stood up in emergency management organization in mid-March to coordinate our response to COVID-19. The primary focus on our site was to protect the health and safety of our workers, first and foremost, so we very quickly implemented everything from mask use to thermal monitoring—you name it—and reduced the number of people working on our site by about 80%. Really, what that was designed to do was to reduce the numbers, so we could put the COVID-19 protection measures in place for the health and safety of employees. What that did was to ensure that we could stabilize the operation, because that was really what the province needed.

The other thing that's very unique about our asset is that even though we're a reliable baseload supplier, we have a unique capability on our site to flex our output by about one third. We're one of the only nuclear plants in the world that can do that. It's something we innovated back after the 2008 recession. Reliability is important, but also flexibility, because you have changes in demand—and we were able to do that.

Medical isotopes are really important. Around the world, PPE has been absolutely critical, and one of the best ways to manufacture large amounts of PPE—whether or not you're going in a doctor's office, you want it sterile. At our facility, we harvest one batch of harvest in March and April. We have another one planned for this September. Who knew that in Ontario, we're producing enough cobalt-60 from our nuclear plants at Bruce to sterilize 24 billion pairs of medical gloves? That's an unbelievable story. If Ontario did not do that, who would? We are the only ones that have this unique capability in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. James Scongack: That all goes through Ottawa-based Nordion. We produce the supply, and then it goes to Ottawa-based Nordion.

We also leveraged our supply chain to actually ask them to retool. We provided the largest private sector donation of PPE across Ontario, 1.5 million pieces of PPE, everything from gloves and masks to gowns, and we're still making those now. We've offered to use our buying power to offer it to any small business, any organization in Ontario, through a website called Strength in Numbers.

You can go on that website, and we will give you that volume pricing that we would get. That's one of the problems small businesses have—that they only need 50 masks, but they pay a huge premium to get a small quantity. Strength in Numbers is all about, "Let's use our buying power and make that buying power available to smaller organizations." We're obviously doing that on a free-of-charge basis for people.

When you're thinking about a pandemic, you can't just think about your own business. Contributing to the reduction of community spread is the best thing you can do to protect the employees at your facility.

Mrs. Robin Martin: You also mentioned the electricity supply during COVID-19 here in Ontario. I was just wondering if you could elaborate a bit on how nuclear power, and Bruce Power specifically, may have helped in ensuring a reliable and affordable supply of electricity for Ontarians during the crisis.

Mr. James Scongack: Let's just look at a really hot day in the middle of the pandemic, when we had record electricity demand in Ontario. On a day like that, we produced about 30% of Ontario's power, the other nuclear facilities provided another 30%, so nuclear was about 60%; hydroelectric was between 20% to 25%. So 85% of our supply came from low-cost, emissions-free nuclear and hydroelectric. On a hot day like that, wind power was about 3%.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. James Scongack: When you're in a crisis, reliability is really important. I'm not critical of renewables, but we have to be honest about the cost of them. Renewables, on an average year basis, are 8% of our supply but almost a third of our cost. When we're thinking about energy policy, we have to value reliability, and reliability also means affordability, because the higher the volume and consistency of power, you're able to keep the price of electricity down that way.

Mrs. Robin Martin: The reliability, I guess, in this context, is really—is the power available when we need it? I know it's sometimes a problem with some of the wind energy and other kinds of power like that because it's not "dispatchable"—I think that's the word. Is that right?

Mr. James Scongack: It's not a criticism; it's just a reality of life. The sun doesn't always shine, and the rain doesn't always fall. That's just the nature of the technology. So you need a range of technologies that provide you that flexibility. That's where you rely on those reliable electricity sources for those kinds of areas—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll have to move to the opposition side now for their time of questioning. MPP Burch.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I just want to thank all the presenters this morning.

I have some questions for the Ontario grape growers. Debbie, it's good to see you again. Thanks for your presentation.

I want to give you a chance to talk a little bit more about the issue of irrigation. I recall a great op-ed you wrote a

couple of years ago about protecting the greenbelt and the importance of understanding that the environment and the economy are not a trade-off; they actually, especially in Niagara, very much support each other and depend upon each other. I'd like to give you a chance to talk a little bit more about, specifically, what the grape growers need in terms of irrigation infrastructure and how important that is, both for the greenbelt and also for competing with those heavily subsidized imports that are still taking up too much room on our shelves.

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: That's exactly what we're competing against—the imports that still dominate our market in Ontario. This COVID-19 recovery certainly demonstrated to all of the growers—and I think consumers are looking to buy local. They're desperate to find local product because they trust it, with the VQA standards.

The opportunities within the greenbelt require everybody to understand the synergies. It's an economic driver for our agricultural industry, but we're also protecting the environment. So when you look at it, it is probably one of the best land use planning decisions that was made many years ago, because it has protected agriculture. But we need it to be seen as a piece of infrastructure no different than a bridge or a road or those other aspects within the economy of the province. We need that investment in irrigation. We don't have a fulsome irrigation strategy. That's why we're trying to get the government to understand that agricultural support should be seen as infrastructure into the economy.

People are depending on a safe, reliable food supply, and that's what we need for the future. We're part of a value chain through to a bottle of wine—but that economic impact is huge in terms of taxes to the province: \$522 million. We're asking for that to be reinvested into our industry.

I see that Stan is on the line, and I want to thank him for his support. He has been vigilant about promoting Ontario.

That's what we need for the future—redirecting some of the money that is going to an imported product towards Ontario. And what better time than now?

1030

We can make this a green recovery for the province. As you know, Jeff, for Niagara, we're blessed with a climate that gives us the ability to grow world-class grapes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: You talked about broadband, and that's been a theme—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: —and I'm sure it will be throughout these sessions. The sector has done a great job in moving to an online sales framework and delivery. How important is that kind of infrastructure to the industry?

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: It's huge. Broadband and high-speed for the rural economy gives us the chance to be more digitally advanced. All of the programming, whether it's on farm—as I mentioned, with fertilizers, and so we know what we're using and you reduce the amount you're using. It goes to the environment again.

Ontario, as a province, has the chance to stand out across the country because of our diversity in agriculture. We're not just grapes; we're so many other products.

Niagara is blessed with grapes, tender fruit, apples, and many other commodities—greenhouses. But we need that infrastructure in the rural area—and gas for greenhouses, and to be able to extend gas, because the greenhouse economy is huge for our province. We need to think how agriculture is different in the sense that we're part of the infrastructure, like a company—Bruce Power, anything else. We're part of that economy and can be much better for it with the right infrastructure support.

I think it's going to take a partnership between the federal and provincial governments. We will invest, if we do have that support from our province, though, and our federal government.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thanks for all the great work you do and for your support of the greenbelt. It has been very strong.

Chair, I'll hand the rest of the time over to my colleague MPP Morrison.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Morrison, with one minute left.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I want to go to the FNTI and Suzanne Brant. Can you talk a little bit about how your students have been learning through COVID-19 and any challenges that you've faced with remote learning and, specifically, Internet access?

Ms. Suzanne Brant: For our students, we've moved all of our programs onto a virtual and online platform. We've used instructional designers to help us move that. Of course, our programming is very culturally relevant, so people see themselves in the learning and also gain the skills. With COVID-19, it has been very difficult. We've had to actually do a lot of workarounds, because a lot of access to Internet is not available. We've designed computers and things that we can get USB keys to them—to still help them stay connected to us and continue the learning.

We haven't lost a single student, and we're meeting our targets for this year's enrolment. Our students believe in our institute, and they know that this is a lifeline for them to gain new skills, to actually become—again, contributing employment and all of those things are so important. If we can get broadband across this province, I'm not kidding you, we can do wonders with all of our students.

So thank you for asking that. Our teams—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We'll have to move to the independent members now.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, everyone, for your presentations.

My first question is also for FNTI. Suzanne, you talked about your new net-zero building that you're looking to build. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how that will diversify or expand upon the opportunities you're able to provide, how much it's going to cost, and to which programs you've applied for the funding.

Ms. Suzanne Brant: The new building that we're looking at is a net-zero building. Technically, it could go right off the grid if we chose to. We designed it with an

Indigenous philosophy at the front, and our own value system—so every space within that building, you see natural light. We're using local materials. That's what we've been sourcing to be able to build it. It has an air circulation system that's very relevant to our longhouse structures.

What we're going to be able to do in that building is a lot of bringing people together to talk about solutions for our communities. We're already a designated research institute. We've gained a SSHRC grant, independent of any college or university partnerships.

We're looking at new programming in the areas of the food incubation system, so that students can come in and look at food security and ways of using traditional foods and creating new products that could be made available to our communities. We're looking at drone training. We have a full aviation program there with planes and things, but we also want to look at how we could transport food from the north to the south and the south to the north—so setting up our traditional trade routes, basically.

We also have a lot of solution-based programming where—a lot of our students are already employed, say, in social work. They bring their case studies right into the classroom, and we use those as real-life case studies to address the needs and the situations within the communities.

Again, we've got 35 years of experience on how to deliver programming to our Indigenous learners and provide that cultural component—the cultural advisers in the classroom, the student supports in the classroom, supporting the unburdening processes from traumas and things that have happened to our learners. We've got that all down, and this new building will provide a space that people can be proud of, that we can actually feel comfortable learning in.

The current space that we deliver in has noisy air conditioners, but we can't bring our staff back into it because there's no ventilation. We need a place where we can continue the success that we've been having so that our students—like I said, we've got over 4,000 alumni in our 102 First Nations communities just in Ontario, and they want to be proud to say that this is where they graduated. Now that we can grant our own degrees and diplomas, we want to have that for them.

Mr. Stephen Blais: It sounds great. Do you have an estimate on the cost to build? And to whom have you applied for money?

Ms. Suzanne Brant: Everything is ready. We're shovel-ready to go. We've done our schematics. We've done all the design work. It's a \$30.24-million building—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Suzanne Brant: We made a request to the federal government, so to Minister Bains and through Indigenous Services Canada. In Ontario, we've also been talking, of course, to Minister Romano under colleges and universities, and we've had lots of support from other ministers within Ontario, like Minister Smith.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate that.

I just have a quick question for the Grape Growers of Ontario. In my previous role, I was very lucky to represent

Domaine Perrault and Vignoble Clos du Vully in Cumberland. I understand the challenges they face in eastern Ontario very well, but I'm trying to understand the challenges you're facing with the greenbelt. Is it a matter of construction of the irrigation system and just the dollars involved to do that, or are there regulatory challenges that need to be overcome?

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: Actually, it's the complete opposite. It's not the greenbelt. The Greenbelt Foundation and working with the greenbelt has been a great partnership from the time it was created.

Full disclosure: I worked on the land use policy development with David Crombie, so I had a hand in bringing that farm position—the economic value of the greenbelt.

We need infrastructure support. We need people to think about agriculture differently than they have in the past. We're not just farmers and growers; we're businesspeople like everyone else, small businesses right across Ontario—and that's why 500 families are small businesses, if you want to put it in a different perspective. That economic driver is part of the economy of Ontario—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: —and having financial support for infrastructure like irrigation would be tremendous.

I didn't read the policies—as you can appreciate today; you have seven minutes—but they're actually embedded in the greenbelt plan to allow things for the expansion of infrastructure like irrigation.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I suspect my time is close to done, so I'll come back. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the opposition side now for the second round. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate everyone's time and presentations today.

I'm going to recognize that today is August 1, which is the end of the moratorium on disconnections, unfortunately, and I'm going to address my questions to Mr. Scongack from Bruce Power.

1040

We've been hearing from our LDCs that have been left to navigate back to billing as normal, unfortunately, and I was thinking of that as you were talking about the need for electricity, obviously, with a hot summer and what that looks like in terms of usage. Unfortunately, as MPP Martin said earlier, people take it for granted when they just turn the light on or off, but we've got a lot of folks who are going to get massive bills, and that process starts today.

Just looking ahead to the future: What do you see in terms of need and consumption through the rest of the summer and into the fall? I know you don't have a crystal ball, but you definitely are the expert in this field, so what do you see coming at Ontarians?

Mr. James Scongack: I'm in huge agreement on the issue of affordability. That's an issue for a lot of working families and a lot of small businesses. We know this hasn't just been a health crisis; it's been an economic crisis for many people.

We're a generator. All I can say is, if any family in Ontario could get 100% of their electricity at the price we sell it into the grid for—the price of electricity would go from 12 cents a kilowatt hour, which is the average they pay, to eight. We're not a high-cost producer, so we're part of the solution. If we had more output at that price, bills would be a lot lower.

I think we're in a really unstable period when it comes to being able to project the demand. Really, the reason for that is what you're seeing in the months of July and August—likely in August, from my perspective; it's only an opinion—is that you have a scenario where you still have a lot of people working from home, a larger segment of the population than is typically the case, and you still have commercial operations opening up. So to some degree, with the air conditioning load, you're really getting hit twice. You have more people at home during the day and so we're seeing higher air conditioning loads, and then we also see commercial facilities. Unfortunately, they're not at their full capacity of people, but they're still cooling to that level.

I think it's very unpredictable, MPP French, and it's a real challenge for the system operator. At the end of the day, if demand grows, that means the economy is back to work, so that's a good thing. But I also think that it's no doubt a real challenge with projecting those things.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Certainly, with so many different patterns, like you said, with folks at home, the kids being at home—and we'll see what happens in September. There won't be air conditioning in schools, unfortunately, so we'll see what happens with that.

To the earlier government point: Electricity really ought to be essential, but it isn't, and here we are.

I really was interested in what you were talking about with the Strength in Numbers program; that is, with the volume prices for businesses.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: We've heard, whether it's from local police departments or hospitals or businesses, the challenges for them to procure PPE, personal protective equipment. They might be able to order it through the government, but they don't know what they're getting, or the volume or the quantity differs, or quality. Have you been able to work with the government—the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services or whoever is involved in procurement—in partnership with them? I think that is something that isn't going to go away, that the needs will be there, and it sounds like you have been showing some leadership and figuring out some strategies. Have you been working with the government on procurement?

Mr. James Scongack: Yes.

Just to clarify, we were declared an essential service—both the electricity business and the isotope business. The government did declare us an essential service, as part of where we were in phase 1.

We've had really good engagement between Minister Fedeli's ministry, Minister Rickford and Minister Walker's ministry and Minister Thompson's ministry in what they've been doing.

If you're a business, you're always better to buy in bulk. What we've got is the Ontario Together fund, where we're actually buying a lot of that in bulk from exactly what you're talking about. It's a lot easier for a business to know, "I've got a million masks I'm going to buy and I can give it to you at this price"—versus a thousand masks at this price point. We're completely aligned with that. What we're doing is giving the bulk buy and then passing that benefit on to any community groups who want to purchase a part of that.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Just for clarification: I didn't mean to misspeak. I recognize that you are essential; I just know that when people can't pay the bills and will be disconnected again without the—

Mr. James Scongack: I see. Sorry about that.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: That's what I was referring to, so my apologies. I wanted to clarify.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I know that my colleague MPP Morrison would like to finish her thought from earlier.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Morrison.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Just to go back to FNTI, if there's anything that you wanted to finish saying—I know our time got cut short—on the issue of connectivity and broadband for your students.

Ms. Suzanne Brant: Thank you for asking.

Again, if we can have broadband brought into First Nations communities, those in those communities can stay there and still continue to learn and bring that capacity right to the community. We have the programming that we can bring to them, but they don't have the access. Having Internet and access to education is probably one of the most critical things in terms of them finding solutions, also, to their community needs. We have the training, like I say, to bring to them, but access and having that access would really improve a lot of people's lives. We want to keep people in our communities, of course—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll go back to the independent members now for their second round. MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Just going back to the grape growers and the investment needed for irrigation: Has there ever been an analysis or an understanding of what kind of dollars we're talking about to provide the proper irrigation that you need in Niagara?

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: Yes, we have a Niagara regional irrigation committee which has done a lot of study. I don't want to speculate on what the outcome of that study will present; I think the number that was used was about \$7.5 million, but it was a shared cost between the individuals. Again, I would be speaking out of turn if I said I had the actual breakdown of the numbers in front of me, but that was about the round number. I would say that about \$7.5 million is what they were projecting, then the breakdown of how that would be shared between levels of government—regional, provincial, federal—and potentially the people on the ground, being the growers.

We have a really good example of a smaller irrigation system in Niagara-on-the-Lake that has worked very well,

but that was put together by the municipality, working with the growers. There's lots of opportunity. I think the extension of that type of infrastructure into the greenbelt is what we need, which will create more opportunities for other growth areas, as well. I always like the fact that the partnership between the federal and provincial government is so necessary when you're doing these kind of broader infrastructure projects.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I agree with that, for sure.

I have questions for James from Bruce Power on the cobalt-60. You talked about your partnership or the relationship you have with MDS in Ottawa. Can you describe a little bit how that works? Are you simply the supplier, and they process it and sell it?

Mr. James Scongack: Yes, that's right. What happens is that we irradiate the cobalt and we provide it in large volumes of what we call cobalt-60. We have two types of cobalt-60: low-specific-activity cobalt-60, which is used in sterilization, and high-specific, which is for breast cancer and brain tumours. We send all of that raw material to Ottawa-based Nordion. They process it, package it, minimize it and distribute it all over the world from there. Ontario supplies about 70% of the world's cobalt-60 used for sterilization.

Mr. Stephen Blais: And does that 70% largely come from Bruce Power, or do the other plants produce cobalt-60 as well?

Mr. James Scongack: Just over half of it comes from Bruce Power. The remaining portion comes from OPG's Pickering facility.

Mr. Stephen Blais: And is that largely transported through trucking or is it by rail or—

Mr. James Scongack: It's primarily through trucking. It's regulated by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, and it's transported in what we call a Type B package, so it's a regulated package. It's transported from here to Ottawa; it has been for many decades. Then, when it's in smaller forms, it doesn't require—it has packaging, but not the same as a Type B package.

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We're also looking to produce a new type of isotope used to treat neuroendocrine tumours and prostate cancer through a partnership with our local First Nations, the Saugeen Ojibway Nation. We will be looking to start that production in 2022 and have structured that in a way where it will contribute to community health needs, through the production of that isotope.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Stephen Blais: This new project that you're working on with First Nations communities—is that something that is definitely happening, and it's just a matter of the processing time and the project? Or are you looking for support or funding for that?

Mr. James Scongack: It's definitely happening. The Saugeen Ojibway Nation is going to be a partner in the project. We plan to complete the installation work by the end of 2021 and start production in 2022.

The Saugeen Ojibway Nation has been engaging with the federal government around funding they would like to

receive as a community, through interest-free loans, so they could do additional investment in the project. If the Saugeen Ojibway Nation does secure federal funding and invests that into the project, the community benefit of that project will 100% accrue to them of any federal grant.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you very much, everyone.

I don't have any other questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side now. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you all for your presentations.

My first question is for Ms. Brant. I want to say, after reading a little bit about the institute, that you have an incredibly impressive track record and an extremely high graduate and job placement rate. As a government, what can we do to assist you to maintain these impressive numbers, coming out of COVID-19?

Ms. Suzanne Brant: Thank you for asking.

There are some key things that would really benefit us. Adequate infrastructure, of course, is really important. Right now, through the act, of course we're looking at funding models that will secure the operations of our organization.

We have projections of having 800 students in our institute by 2024, so supporting the growth of capacity within our organization is really important. We've done a great job, over the last three years, to secure that capacity, to deliver quality and ensure that our students are properly supported. Of course, as our numbers grow and as we reach more communities—not only in Ontario; we're hoping to go across Canada to serve other Indigenous communities—we want to make sure that we can have the operational support.

But infrastructure is a big issue right now for us.

Ms. Donna Skelly: When we talk about infrastructure—and we've been hosting these hearings for a number of months now. Undoubtedly, the number one concern that is raised over and over again, regardless of the sector or part of Ontario the speaker might be from—we're hearing that reliable broadband is a concern, dealing with COVID-19, trying to function as a family, as an educator, as a business. How has that impacted your institute and what can we do? Remembering, of course, that this is an exceptionally expensive service to provide to all of Ontario, and it really does fall under the purview of our federal counterpart—but we are taking huge measures to ensure that we are doing our part. How has the broadband connection impacted your students?

Ms. Suzanne Brant: We have some students who are completely off the grid, who just don't have access. Their stories, because we would bring them together in an intense delivery model—they would come out of the community into a community where we would deliver the program for a week and bring in our teams and our instructors. They have made statements that that was a lifeline for them. For me, sitting on the other side, talking with them and hearing these stories—it just shows us more and more how important it is that we continue to be able to serve them.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Suzanne Brant: So we've done a lot of work-arounds like putting programming in and things on computers and providing those computers directly to them. We're continuing to stay connected to them and continuing to provide them with education, because we recognize that this is truly a lifeline for them. The separation from the cohorts, from their peers and things, is also impactful, because their stories are very similar. Sharing those stories and finding solutions to serve their communities is so important.

Broadband just helps to keep us connected. We've seen that within our own staff. Having Zoom and being able to connect everybody keeps you connected. That connection is critical.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Chair, how much time do we have left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes, almost.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'd like to ask Ms. Zimmerman—and it's so nice to see you again before our committee. It's expanding on this need for broadband. My riding is a mix of rural and urban. We have a significant number of members of the agricultural sector in Flamborough–Glanbrook and they have raised with me the need to have access to reliable broadband because, of course, the farming sector has changed. It's evolved so much over the past number of years. Could you share with us the critical need for reliable broadband for people within your sector, the grape growers?

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: It's very nice to see you, Ms. Skelly, as well.

I think it's critical for our agriculture, in general, in the rural areas. Everything has become more automated. Online sales for wine during COVID-19 have been unbelievable, and the expectation is that a lot of the small wineries need access to broadband so that they can get to the consumer. Otherwise, you're lining up—and there are very long lineups at the LCBO. Certainly, we welcome that as well, and the support of the LCBO has been phenomenal for our Ontario products. But it's also necessary for precision agriculture.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: We need that opportunity to access automation for our agricultural products, particularly when we're producing wine. We can also access it for record keeping, which helps, obviously, in the environment—whether you're using too much water, too much fertilizer, all those other things.

So it's a necessary tool for the future—and it's no different than anybody else on this call, on these presentations. It's critical, I think, to the success of the province in general for its agricultural sector and will make us a leader—in Ontario and in Canada—because we are so blessed with agricultural opportunities.

Ms. Donna Skelly: And great Ontario wine.

Ms. Debbie Zimmerman: You got it. Thanks a lot.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentations.

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The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next group of presenters: First, I would like to call upon Northern Transformer Corp. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Giovanni Marcelli: Giovanni Marcelli.

Mr. Colin Mark: And Colin Mark, Northern Transformer.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Please go ahead.

Mr. Giovanni Marcelli: Good morning, everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to present.

I want to bring to your attention that Ontario was a recognized powerhouse in transformer manufacturing during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, exporting all over North America. Conversely, in the last five years, Canada has imported an annual average of \$200 million of transformers. Sadly enough, 50% of our total consumption is now imported.

Currently, Northern Transformer is the only liquid-filled transformer manufacturer in Ontario capable of serving the Canadian and USA utilities. Our plant is located in Maple, Ontario, and 70% of the material spent is procured in Ontario. This brings the Ontario economy great benefits.

In July 2012, I acquired Northern Transformer, a small 30-year-old company, with the intent of growing the transformer business to the level of prominence that Ontario once enjoyed and making Ontario a recognized exporter of transformers again.

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In the last eight years, Northern Transformer has come a long way: from 23 employees to 102; from an antiquated 23,000-square-foot building to a 105,000-square-foot, purpose-built, state-of-the-art facility; from building smaller and less complex transformers to winning contracts with Bruce Power, OPG, Hydro One, Hydro-Québec, NB Power, Fortis, Dayton Power, Florida Power and many more. Northern Transformer is one of the few approved transformer vendors to Bruce Power and is fully capable of producing their transformers here in Maple, Ontario.

Northern Transformer has recently acquired VRT, a 50-year-old, now-closed-down Israeli transformer manufacturer. VRT was well-established in the North American market, and now Northern Transformer can service their clients from our Maple facility.

We've worked very hard, and we have enjoyed continuous growth.

And then COVID-19 struck, casting a dark cloud on the future of our 102 employees, their families and the additional 900 families from our Ontario suppliers. COVID-19

also delayed our 17,000-square-foot expansion and put on hold our projected 48 new hires.

Then our client, Bruce Power, proposed the Retooling and Economic Recovery Council, a very creative and effective plan to stimulate the economic recovery. The Bruce Power proposal would provide work security for our employees and use flexibility to win more contracts from other clients and grow our exports in the USA. Bruce Power would have the transformers built well in advance—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Giovanni Marcelli:—avoiding potential delays, and benefit from a more flexible work schedule. The government of Canada would play a key role in keeping thousands of jobs in place and would be a powerful driver of economic recovery.

In the next 10 years, Bruce Power will need 70 transformers for their ongoing life-extension program, which will generate low-cost, reliable, safe and carbon-free power. Building these transformers without delay would give Northern Transformer enough work to proceed at full speed with our expansion. It would create additional construction jobs and would allow us to hire and train 48 new employees immediately.

This plan is well timed to benefit hundreds of Ontario families when they most need it. This is a true win-win proposition—a proposition that creates jobs for hundreds of Ontario residents while increasing our exports in the USA. Bruce Power will benefit from a more flexible work schedule and less potential delays. Our government will collect taxes from gainfully employed residents and experience reduced unemployment. In our humble opinion, this proposition is very beneficial and it would elevate the Ontario transformer industry back to the earlier prominence and generate much larger exports to the USA.

On behalf of our employees, our families and the families of—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Giovanni Marcelli:—Canadian clients and suppliers, we want to thank you profusely for your anticipated support.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Our next presenter is the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Andy Manahan: Good morning, Chair Sandhu and esteemed members of the finance and economic affairs committee. My name is Andy Manahan. I'm the executive director of the RCCAO. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to provide you with some insight into how the infrastructure sector has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario is comprised of key labour and management stakeholders in our sector. It was formed to address the challenges affecting the delivery of projects such as the procurement and approval processes. In fact, our very first report provided advice to the provincial government on the

establishment of the public-private partnership program through Infrastructure Ontario. We work together with government and industry experts to offer realistic solutions to problems in the areas of infrastructure delivery. This includes resilient infrastructure, growth planning, regulatory reform and skilled labour issues.

Since our inception in 2005, the importance of investing in public works, from transit and water systems to roads and bridges, and doing so smartly and efficiently for taxpayers and daily users of infrastructure has been a primary goal of ours. Although we are focused on provincial matters, we have been lobbying Ottawa for more infrastructure funds. In fact, last week, we submitted a pre-budget submission to the federal government.

Infrastructure lays the foundation for building a prosperous and inclusive nation and province, as well as providing significant opportunity for economic growth, competitiveness and fostering strong communities across Ontario. The role of infrastructure has never been more important than it is now, and as Ontario seeks to recover from the effects of COVID-19, strategic investments in infrastructure provide one of the best ways to achieve that goal. Certainly, we recognize that we are in a revenue-constrained environment, so we must make smart investments and have to be cost-effective, as well.

Research has demonstrated that the impact of infrastructure spending on job creation is significant. For every \$1 billion in infrastructure spending, 16,700 new jobs are generated each year. Increased investment in infrastructure also spreads throughout the economy via a series of multiplier effects. For every \$1 billion in infrastructure spending, the GDP is boosted by \$1.14 billion—and actually, in the transportation sector, the multipliers are even higher than that. We can help the economy overall by lowering business costs by putting in place productivity enhancement in infrastructure.

Since the start of the pandemic, the construction sector has been a leader in the province. For the most part, construction is deemed to be an essential activity, and we are grateful for this designation. Those who are responsible for achieving high health and safety standards take this role seriously. Our industry has taken the necessary steps to address COVID-19 in the workplace.

We recognize that municipalities have been hard hit by the pandemic, and this has had a ripple effect on at least part of the construction sector. Municipalities, as we all know, have faced tremendous fiscal challenges because of the pandemic, and this has had a negative impact on infrastructure projects. The most recent announcement earlier this week, on Monday, by Ottawa and Queen's Park, to support municipalities and transit systems is recognition of the unprecedented cash crunch that local governments are experiencing. Unfortunately, the municipal sector had already been slowing down before this announcement and had not been proceeding with priority infrastructure projects that were planned for 2020.

Surveys conducted by our members indicate that the pipeline of municipal projects for the fall season has dropped off significantly, with some construction firms

signalling that the situation for the remainder of the year looks bleak. The lack of municipal tenders is a very concerning sign for the industry, as it indicates a drop in construction activity and state-of-good-repair infrastructure projects.

Although we applaud the recent \$19-billion assistance through the Safe Restart Agreement, which includes the \$4 billion for Ontario municipalities, there should be a sustained focus on assisting municipalities as the pandemic ensues. We, too, are counting on the federal government to bring forward a broader stimulus package, hopefully in September.

In early June, RCCAO commissioned an evaluation of infrastructure investment—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Andy Manahan:—by well-respected analytical firm CANCEA. The report confirmed that municipal governments are facing the prospect of massive operating deficits due to the heightened need for services and a simultaneous drop in revenue. Combined with a significant expected decline in GDP, this could put Ontario's infrastructure investments at risk, which will have long-term implications for growth even after the COVID-19 threat has passed. The report recommends that governments focus on strategic investments in state-of-good-repair projects that will keep jobs and growth on track and our municipalities afloat. Failure to address municipal deficits and maintain infrastructure spending will have devastating economic consequences across Ontario. Specifically, the report recommends that the federal and Ontario governments invest in infrastructure at pre-COVID-19 levels and that the federal government cover the majority of municipal operating deficits. Under this scenario, Ontario would gain 61,000 jobs on average per year over the next 10 years, and the federal and provincial governments would receive \$9 billion and \$13 billion respectively in revenues.

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Research shows that in times of a challenging recovery, such as the one we are experiencing, it's critical for the construction sector to be working as efficiently as possible and looking for ways to streamline the approvals process. We are thus greatly encouraged by several pieces of legislation that the government has recently introduced and passed.

The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act ushered in changes that were necessary to expedite building approvals and cut unnecessary red tape. One specific area of positive change in Bill 197 pertains to the modernization of Ontario's environmental assessment system. For us specifically, that revolves around the municipal class EA process. Our partners in the municipal sector have said that the goal is to improve the process, but not to change outcomes. The proposed amendments mean that the same project will be built, whether it's a bridge, a bike lane or a sewage treatment facility, with the same environmental oversight, but it will be constructed faster—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Andy Manahan:—and at a lower cost for taxpayers.

We are also pleased to see that the Building Transit Faster Act will allow for early works, which will help to deliver transformative projects such as the Ontario Line more efficiently and quickly compared to the previous timelines of many projects. For example, relocating utilities in advance of certain EPA work will help to speed up the process.

I did want to mention that many of our construction members are experiencing difficulties with the Ontario One Call Act, which was enacted in 2012. Even though there's a legislated requirement for five business days to get markings on projects where the underground facilities are, we're finding that hundreds of projects are taking weeks to get those markings. So if there's another area to speed up the process, we would recommend that that would be a serious area for the government to look at.

I know I'm running out of time—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. Your time has come up now.

We'll have to move to the next presenter, the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs. Please state your name for the record, and you have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Landon French: My name is Landon French. I'm the CEO of the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs. It's an honour to be back in front of this committee, talking about one of Ontario's great recreational pastimes.

For those not familiar with the OFSC, we are a volunteer-led, not-for-profit provincial federation, representing almost 200 community-based organizations which provide the infrastructure for organized snowmobiling across the province. We have a very strong relationship with the government of Ontario, delivering Ontario's snowmobile trail permits, and we deliver the Ontario driver safety training programs. Today, I'll highlight some challenges pertaining to snowmobiles and, therefore, economic infrastructure in the province.

The OFSC-prescribed trail system is a network of over 30,000 kilometres, representing half of the total recreational trails in Ontario. We offer some of the best snowmobiling you'll find anywhere. While we attract riders from all over the world, 95% of our 80,000 trail permits are sold to Ontarians from every riding in the province.

Snowmobile trail permit holders in Ontario expect good, safe riding conditions, and every year, we strive to meet those expectations. To do this, we recruit and train an army of volunteers, operating almost 300 groomers stationed across the province. Groomers are worth about \$300,000 each, and each year we purchase approximately 10 with revenue from permits. As with other community organizations, volunteers are the foundation of our support. This year, we expect a decline in volunteer hours due to the pandemic. This may in turn impact the number of trails we're able to groom and open.

From a built-infrastructure perspective, OFSC clubs manage over 3,500 bridges, approximately 15,000 culverts and almost 250 buildings. When we build a bridge, for example, it has to hold enough weight to support a 10-ton groomer, or sometimes an 80-ton logging truck.

These are significant structures that must meet very high construction standards. They can't be built all by volunteers.

Last year, we spent \$700,000 on trail infrastructure, but we're not keeping up. The pandemic has put us further behind on trail, bridge and groomer repairs, which again puts more pressure on volunteers and clubs, who fundraise for some of this work.

Looking longer-term, we estimate our five-year capital infrastructure deficit to be in the range of \$11 million, and the gap is widening. Trail infrastructure in Ontario is funded through three sources: permit sales, local club fundraising and, this year, a grant from the Ministry of Transportation which provided us with \$500,000—and we certainly appreciate those funds; 2020 is the first year of our MTO agreement, and we have not received news yet on what our funding might be like for next year.

From a revenue perspective, we don't know what this year will bring either, but we continue to keep our permit prices low. Since 2013, we've raised permit fees by a total of 4.5%, or \$10. Most Ontarians pay \$190 for their permit, while Quebecers, by comparison, pay \$330 a year. Plus, the federation in Quebec receives a large percentage of provincial registration and licence fees and an additional \$10 million in federal funding—things we do not have here in Ontario.

Also, to compare, in most US states, snowmobile organizations are state-owned, with state employees managing state trails—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Landon French: —funded through permits, licence fees and gas tax revenue. Our system is different. We understand that. However, our funding model and volunteers can't keep up, and the virus has put us further behind.

Ontario has about 150,000 active snowmobilers. Without a change in our revenue system, these trails may be at risk, and therefore, snowmobilers may ride in places they should not, putting themselves and others at risk while harming our environment, farm fields and landowners' private property.

Snowmobiling contributes up to \$3.1 billion to Ontario's economy each year, and expenditures benefit small businesses across the province. Many of these businesses, as you know, have been hit hard. We know we're not an essential service. However, we can be part of the economic recovery.

Our province is resilient. We'll come out of this situation stronger, and we think now is the time to reinvest in activities that bring Ontarians back to nature and keep us mentally and physically healthy. With an investment in Ontario's snowmobile trail network as part of an infrastructure stimulus package, we could start to rebuild our trail infrastructure this year and ensure that Ontario's small businesses survive through the winter.

From a process perspective, the transfer payment agreement with MTO is in place. We have an inventory of what we need, and we're ready to go for the snow.

Thank you very much for your time today. I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll start with the questions now. This set of questions will start with the independent members.

Before we do that, I need to do an attendance check. MPP West, if you can please confirm your attendance?

Mr. Jamie West: Jamie West, from Sudbury.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, everyone, for your presentations this morning.

I'd like to start with the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.

Thank you, Andy, for the presentation. You talked about how municipal tenders are down as a result of a lack of clarity and confidence around their funding and the shortfalls they've received, and the lack of definition around a provincial and federal program. Do you have an estimate as to how much lower the tenders are—either by a dollar figure or an average, so far, year to date?

Mr. Andy Manahan: The survey I referred to was from one segment of our industry, and that was the heavy contractors association. They do a lot of work in terms of bridges. These are civil-type projects. They do deep foundation work, for example, for condominium buildings, so that's private sector, and also tunnelling for subways and other types of transit systems.

I don't have an exact figure across the board, but our members are continually feeding us informal information and saying that, overall, they're seeing a drop in the tenders just because of the difficult situation that municipalities are facing. We can understand that, and there is a cash crunch that I referred to. That's why we're saying it's a desperate situation right now, and we recognize that there is only so much the province can do.

Municipalities have to balance their budgets, and the federal government is the only one that can print cash, so that's why we started lobbying up in Ottawa earlier this spring.

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Mr. Stephen Blais: When you talk about the need to focus on strategic investments, what do you have in mind? We often hear about the infrastructure renewal deficit and just simple repavings and potholes and waste water etc., but often governments overlook those for the shiny new baubles. What did you have in mind from a strategic investment point of view?

Mr. Andy Manahan: I'll make this into two categories, and I'll compare it to 10 years ago when we were going through the financial crisis. Ten years ago, a lot of Ontario municipalities did not have rigorous asset management plans. The province encouraged all sizes of municipalities to come forward, and in many cases they were saying, "You will not get funding from the province unless you can show that you have a plan." So municipalities actually have a good list right now of what they can do in terms of state-of-good-repair. These are what I would call priority lists.

The second category would be what I would call more in the long-term category, and that's laying the foundation

for future growth. If Canada gets back to normal in terms of its immigration, we're going to need to accommodate that population with a range of infrastructure. Certainly, Minister McKenna in Ottawa has said that we need a triple lens on this kind of thing. It should be resilient in terms of climate change or more severe weather. We need to be inclusive. Those are all important strategic objectives, and with COVID-19, I think we are able to look at how we might calibrate to do things a little bit better.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Stephen Blais: In the same vein, to the snow-mobile group: You mentioned that you have a list effectively ready to go—you didn't say shovel-ready, but I expect that's what you're effectively getting at. Is that largely maintenance and renewal, or is that some kind of expansion of the network?

Mr. Landon French: No. We're just trying to maintain the network that we have. There has been significant investment over 50 years into that network, and we're trying to keep it going, for sure. There are examples of that, mostly in central and northern Ontario but throughout the province.

Mr. Stephen Blais: You mentioned that you'd like to be part of some kind of infrastructure stimulus program. What kind of dollars are you thinking about?

Mr. Landon French: As we look forward we've got, we think, over five years, about \$11 million worth of work that needs to be done.

The other element of this is, our groomer fleet continues to age, and we need to upgrade our groomer fleet to make sure that we're safely and efficiently grooming the trails. So there are a number of projects. Like other industries, we're limited by frost, so we need to make sure that we can work in what is our off-season and get those things done.

We are competing with municipalities for engineering, consulting and other approvals and things like that, so there's a lot of work going on right now. These are generally smaller projects than, say, a road or other infrastructure.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Landon French: We've got a lot of challenges on that front, but we're looking forward to working through them.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate that there are smaller projects and you often have a harder time getting attention for them.

Have you ever had experience with bundling your projects with municipal projects as part of a larger tender package and working in co-operation that way?

Mr. Landon French: Not so much bundling, perhaps—there have been projects in the past. I joined OFSC in May, so they all predate me. We have bundled with MTO, for example, on highway projects, so you do see either rights-of-way that go under a highway or some bridges that go over, and we have a number of municipal partners across the province that we do work with. When they make a change to a roadway or a crossing, we are certainly involved. Are we bundling them? Not necessarily; I wouldn't say that we have a program to that effect.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side now. MPP Cho.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you for your presentations today, gentlemen. They're very well received.

Before I get to my questions, Mr. Manahan—I'm not sure if you concluded your entire presentation. It seemed like you were wrapping up. Do you want to take a minute or two to just finish up what you were saying?

Mr. Andy Manahan: Thank you for the opportunity.

I was talking a little bit about utility locates, and what I would suggest is that there are some operational things that could be done. Obviously, there are differences between a homeowner who is getting Rogers or Bell or something of that nature and a larger construction project where we have multiple contractors or subcontractors on a site. Unfortunately, the rules as they now stand require each of those subcontractors to get their own locates, and that can be very time-consuming. We think that for one project, they should be able to share the utility locates. Those are time-limited in 30 days, and we've seen sometimes that the project can't get going in 30 days, so they have to get everything re-marked again.

This is an area where we will be providing more detailed advice, but we have had a lot of discussions because when the stimulus money comes, we want to be ready to rock and roll.

Mr. Stan Cho: That's really great to hear, Andy. I think that's a very valid point. We have to make sure that there are no other impediments once we start to move forward. These sorts of infrastructure investments are going to be crucial in our recovery plan as we move forward. So, please, I look forward to that information being sent along.

Mr. French, you mentioned that Quebec is getting federal funding and Ontario is not. Do you have a theory on why that is?

Mr. Landon French: They're probably better at lobbying than we are, and we need to do a better job on that front. Some of that is federal heritage funding. We have to do a better job of making our case in Ottawa. Some help from our provincial partners would be great in that regard, and we'd welcome going together to talk about that.

A lot of that funding goes into the purchase of groomers. As I said, groomers are expensive pieces of equipment for us. They're exactly the same things you'd see on a ski hill, with some different attachments and things like that. They're heavy and expensive, and they're expensive to maintain. They go through a lot. We put a lot of hours on them. So our groomer fleet is something that is certainly vulnerable, and we would welcome any kind of support from that perspective, as well.

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate that, Mr. French.

You mentioned something that we are talking about at finance every day, and it's that uncertainty around the revenue piece. Certainly, I understand that that's hitting every sector in our country. Tell me about that revenue question mark.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Stan Cho: What do you expect the impact to be from our visitors from the United States? How many

visitors do you have from abroad? And what do you expect that to do for your revenue?

Mr. Landon French: About 5% of our 80,000 permit holders come from other jurisdictions, whether that's the United States or Quebec or Manitoba. We are not expecting to see any of those—or very few of those. So we're already discounting our season by 5%.

There are some upsides. We're hoping that Ontarians who don't travel south as they might normally do are looking for other activities in Ontario, and we want to be ready for them. Should they get back into snowmobiling or want to try snowmobiling, we'll be ready from a trails perspective. The challenge for us is that we sell our permits in October and November, largely; 70% of our permits are sold in October. Should we find ourselves in a second wave in that period of time, that might cause some people to pause.

There's concern that people might ride without a permit. As I said in my comments, there are 150,000 registered snowmobiles that are insured and licensed in Ontario—only 80,000 of those purchase a permit every year, so there's a gap there. Some of those are work sleds or on private property and other things, but we think there's a significant number of Ontarians who aren't purchasing a snowmobile permit, and we would love to get them purchasing a permit and on our prescribed trails and travelling in a safe way.

Mr. Stan Cho: As we move forward, we're going to need some creative ideas for revenue generation across all sectors, so, Mr. French, I look forward to you sharing those ideas. We're limited on time now, but if you could send them along, we would be very interested to hear those. Consumer confidence is also a crucial part of this.

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To our friends at Northern Transformer: Mr. Marcelli, I—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Stan Cho:—really appreciated your story about job creation. I come from the small business world. We need to help your expansion. How do we get out of the way? How do we move the red tape? How do we make sure that you are creating those jobs?

Mr. Giovanni Marcelli: There are various things that government can do. There are a lot of projects that are financed by various levels of government that, unfortunately, ignore the presence of Canadian manufacturers, and we lose the 50% of transformers that we import, that come from various parts of the world. That is something that we could minimize, and possibly work towards exporting transformers, as we used to do.

The plan, the proposal that Bruce Power has put forward—which is a federal proposal, mostly—is a great one. They need a lot of work done in the—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll have to move to the opposition side. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate everyone's presentations today.

I'm going to leave my colleagues to ask most of the questions, but I just wanted to say to Mr. French and to the

committee that we're no relation—but it's nice to meet you. Also, I look forward to finding out that there will be investment, because I think, to your point, there will be many people in the winter—depending on where we are with the pandemic and whatnot—who will be seeking outdoor opportunities. We don't want them off-trail and in trouble. You were talking about the economic pieces; I think there's also just the human need. We're all needing to be out of our homes, and we certainly will in the winter, as well. I'll leave more questions for you to my colleagues.

Back to Mr. Marcelli and Northern Transformer: I live in Oshawa, and a good story of manufacturing is not lost on me. I would certainly like to see the investment and the support for you and other Canadian manufacturers, especially in terms of growth. We don't need to think small; we need to think strong. If you could please continue what you were saying, because I was appreciating MPP Cho's question—how can the government either get out of the way or get on board, or what do you need from our provincial government?

Mr. Giovanni Marcelli: We need your support to promote the Bruce Power proposal, because if we have committed to work that will take place in 10 years—think of 70 transformers that would have to be built in 10 years. Those transformers will be built in the next two or three years, at a time when our economy needs them the most. That would give us the ability to continue our growth. The expansion would allow us to hire additional people and train people, and also give us the flexibility to win more jobs in the US and increase our exports.

It is a great market. We have a great team that we have assembled, and we certainly are capable and willing to bring sales to Canada and take care of our internal market as well.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I know that my northern colleagues have some questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I really appreciate the presentations and the cross-section of concerns that people have, and the uncertainty. I think we're all feeling that; we hear it in our constituencies every day.

My question is for Mr. French. Being a northerner—it's obvious that snowmobiling and that culture of snowmobile operations is a big driver in our community, but in northwestern Ontario, we've seen a bit of a decline around some of it. Is there an issue with the infrastructure dollars? In northern Ontario, we have trouble getting money for roads—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:—so I'm wondering, is that something that snowmobile clubs and organizations are finding in northwestern Ontario?

Mr. Landon French: Thanks for your question. The answer is, absolutely.

As I mentioned in my remarks, volunteerism is so important to us. We estimate that we have about 6,000 volunteers regularly maintaining the trails across the province every year, but that number is dwindling. And

the pressure we have on that number this year is going to become higher when people who are at risk are not able to get out and join a crew or groom. From that perspective, we could have a challenge.

Across the province, we do have infrastructure, like bridges in particular, culverts, road crossings, things like that, that are at risk. We do get travellers who go from all over Ontario to northwestern Ontario to ride some of our fantastic trails and loops, so we want to promote that kind of tourism and promote that kind of travel. If people are staying home this season, then that's something we want to be able to do.

We won't know until we have the revenue in the fall of what our season can look like. We've got a plan coming that will anticipate a lot of that, contemplate what the season could be and give Ontarians, we hope, some confidence around what we're able to provide. We do have some infrastructure projects we're trying to get in the ground before the frost this year, but many more—if we start now, we can do a great deal more, starting in May, June, July next year.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you for those comments, and thank you for the contribution to tourism, which is also such an important part of our economy here in northwestern Ontario. I'd encourage all of you to come up here when you can, because it is a beautiful part of the world.

I'm going to hand it off to my northeastern colleague Jamie.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP West, 45 seconds.

Mr. Jamie West: Chair, I'll just start in the second round.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go back to the government side for the second round. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My question is also to Mr. French. Being a northerner, snowmobiling was not just a recreational activity—I remember going to school on a snowmobile. We used it in our cities and our little towns throughout the winter.

Clearly, your season isn't open yet. I'm just wondering how you're able to speculate how COVID-19 is going to impact your season moving forward.

Mr. Landon French: Like I said earlier, I joined on May 1, essentially, and from the beginning, we began doing some homework and some research into snowmobile usage throughout the province, looking at our ridership. With 95% of our riders being Ontarians, and given the fact that people are not likely to travel to the United States, Florida, Cuba or other places like that, we think we could be okay.

We are also watching other industries like boating, ATVs—other recreational pursuits in the summertime—and seeing that there has been some increase in traffic and increase in those activities. We're also talking to our dealers who sell snowmobiles and watching that very carefully.

So we've got a pretty good indication. The wild card is always the virus. We are seeing more parts of the province

open up, but should that turn, then like everyone else, we will feel it. We're prepared for that. We're bringing in new health and safety protocols for every club. We will have health and safety protocols for riders themselves. Even though it is an outdoor activity, there are some things you need to be aware of and take into consideration. We're trying to do everything we can to be as ready as we possibly can, and watching some other industries to learn from them.

Ms. Donna Skelly: You spoke about infrastructure and mentioned that the grooming on a portion of the trails is provided by volunteers. What is the percentage of volunteers versus paid workers?

Mr. Landon French: It's high. I don't have the exact number handy, but by far, most of our groomers are volunteers.

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Ms. Donna Skelly: Can you speculate on how it would impact the grooming of the trails?

Mr. Landon French: We've heard two things from our membership. We've done a number of town halls to try to get to the bottom of this. One, we've got some older groomer operators who have been at this for years and know the trails inside and out, but they are in that at-risk category, whether they have a lung issue, a cardiac issue, whatever. They are not feeling comfortable being out, and they would rather stay home.

We've got other people, from a work perspective, who have not had the hours that they normally have, or someone in their family has lost some hours, so they're trying to find work and make up the difference. They might not have the time to work on a groomer or go out and do a 10-hour groomer run.

So there are some challenges coming that way that we are anticipating, and we're trying to find some new volunteers to help.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My next question is for Mr. Manahan.

We've heard from many members of the construction industry throughout these hearings, but clearly you will play a pivotal role moving forward.

Is there anything that you feel we haven't yet addressed in terms of what role your industry can play and how we can collaborate, beyond what we've heard from you today and from other members previously?

Mr. Andy Manahan: There is one area that the industry has had lengthy discussions with the Ministry of Transportation and Metrolinx and certainly Infrastructure Ontario on, and that has to do with P3 projects and risk allocation. I'll give you an example: With the Eglinton Crosstown LRT project going through the middle of Toronto, it was discovered around Yonge Street that there were a lot of ancient utilities that were not on anyone's surveys or maps or anything like that. Our discussions with, let's call it the province, have been that it's inappropriate for the private sector to take on that kind of

risk. So I think we're making progress in that regard. For future projects, I believe that the province will rightfully take that risk over.

Where we're heading further discussions right now, and perhaps your help on this would be needed, is that because of COVID-19—there are certain contractual provisions, especially in larger P3 projects, that if you don't hit the timelines, you can face severe penalties for lack of progress. Earlier in the morning, both Minister Scott and the deputy minister talked about a slowdown in productivity on many construction sites, because we have to have physical distancing. There's obviously way more PPE. If you're going up a hoist in a building—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Andy Manahan:—you can only have one person or two, and not three or four. So the work has slowed down. We don't want to be penalized for that if we're trying to keep our workforce safe.

Ms. Donna Skelly: One of the areas that is raised often in these committee hearings is red tape—just your comments on what we can do as a government, or what we have done to address this, in terms of construction.

Mr. Andy Manahan: The municipal class environmental assessment process is something I have worked on personally with my friends at the Municipal Engineers Association, AMO and the Ontario Good Roads Association. In fact, three years ago, we launched an environmental bill of rights process to try to get those changes.

I'll just give you one example: In 2016, I was before this very same committee. I was talking about a low-risk maintenance type of activity that almost every municipality does, and that has to do with snow plowing. The way it stood—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll go to the opposition side for the second round. MPP West.

Mr. Jamie West: I'm hopefully going to have time to ask everybody at least one question.

I'd like to start with Northern Transformer and Mr. Marcelli. Before the election, I actually dealt with transformers replacement. I worked in health and safety, and we had older infrastructure. What I noticed as we replaced a lot of transformers is, you'd see a stamp on the side, that "Proudly built in Canada" or "Built in North America." As we removed them, I kept thinking about the loss of manufacturing jobs. So I'm really happy that you're here to talk about this. I'm really excited to hear more about Ontario transformers.

I think, because of COVID-19, especially, and in general, Ontarians would support "made in Ontario," "made in Canada." Do you think something like a made-in-Ontario, made-in-Canada tax credit program would help your business as well, to help offset people from choosing cheaper options overseas?

Mr. Giovanni Marcelli: Absolutely. The problem that we have when we're competing with Korea or Taiwan is that they have subsidies, and we know that as a fact. Their price can be half of what our cost is, and there is no way

that we can compete with that. If other governments are willing to subsidize the products, it cuts us.

Recently, we lost a very large project in northern Ontario to Korea, a \$22-million transformer job. We had built the first two ourselves, and then when it was a bulk of 20 units, the Koreans were able to provide a price probably 30%, 40% lower than ours, and here we are, not having the work.

If we want a manufacturing plant for transformers in Ontario to take care of our utilities and our people, we need to do something to help us, because we are doing the best we can, and at times, we're struggling because there is lack of support.

Mr. Jamie West: I'm going to move to Mr. Manahan from the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario. I want to thank you, as well.

We've heard consistently on these calls about the importance of infrastructure construction. We've heard it from groups like yours, from municipalities, contractors, labourers. I'm just emphasizing this so the government is listening about how everyone is united that this is going to help rebuild the economy and kick-start the economy.

One of the facts you'd said—and I was trying to take notes, but you were trying to keep up with the time. You started off by saying a \$1-billion investment boosts GDP—and I lost the number. How much does the \$1-billion investment boost GDP?

Mr. Andy Manahan: That was \$1.14 billion, but I think I indicated that for transportation, you could get up to \$1.6 billion; for example, with port infrastructure for moving freight across the Great Lakes seaway.

Mr. Jamie West: You talked in different ways about the direct jobs and the spinoff jobs. The first thing we're all thinking about right now is trades, because we're working on building up the trades class, but there are civil engineers, the project management, safety management, labourers, the office workers and then those spinoff jobs of tourism. If you're bringing in people who are from out of town, they're staying in hotels, they're eating in restaurants or they're getting food from grocery stores. At one point, you talked about 16,700 new jobs each year.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jamie West: Did you want to expand on the importance of creating jobs?

Mr. Andy Manahan: Absolutely. Construction is a derived industry—on the one side, we react to growth, but we also create growth because there's a whole supply chain that's attached to it. If you're building a condominium and people are moving into it, they're going to be buying furniture, carpets and you name it. On the infrastructure side, we're helping to enhance goods movement, and hopefully, when we get back to some sort of normal, whether it's on a bus or you're driving on the road to get to your office—this is all critical in terms of the movement of people and goods.

Mr. Jamie West: I worked in the trades. I've done this work, and I know the value when you drive past something you've built and it's there 20 years later. It feels great.

I'm going to move on to Mr. French for the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs. I want to thank you for

your advocacy. I think this is the first time, at least while I've been on the call, that we've heard from an organization like yours. You see small organizations that are—many, many small organizations that rear large. On behalf of Sudbury, I want to thank you, because every fall, all you hear around town is people saying “braap, braap”—people just getting excited for snowmobiling. I was thinking about how it's such a relaxing way to get out. I think during COVID-19, it might actually be more encouraging, because you do self-isolate. You have a built-in mask with your helmet.

I want to go on to the army of volunteers. I know you couldn't give a definite number, but I know it's a higher percentage, because I've met the volunteers. They're incredibly dedicated, but I agree with you, these are groups that are going to be affected. They're often retirees. They're typically more concerned about COVID-19 and that sort of injury.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Jamie West: I want to emphasize again the cost savings of all these volunteers compared to the States, where it's state-funded.

You talked about having funding last year and not receiving an announcement last year. What was the amount last year? And do you think this year you need the same amount or more?

Mr. Landon French: We received \$500,000, which we got confirmation of a few weeks ago. We have a four-year agreement with MTO, but the number is not fixed for infrastructure support, so every year we would be trying to figure out what that number is. But the transfer agreement is in place. We have the mechanism for MTO or the government to flow funds, and we have the criteria. We've been surveying our clubs to find out what their infrastructure needs are because, having been through SARS—I had just left the government at the time, and knowing what that economic recovery looked like, I suspected that we might be having a conversation like this. So we are ready to go with—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll go to the independent members now. MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. French, if you wanted to finish your answer, go ahead.

Mr. Landon French: Thank you. I was just saying, we have an inventory of projects. Some might need some engineering and some other work to prepare, but we know what we need to do, and we're happy to work with the government to get it done.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Mr. Manahan, in Ottawa we have a number of major infrastructure projects on the go, a housing boom. We hear quite often of the shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour and, as a result, either build quality has gone down or has been slowed up.

If the government were to come forward with a major investment in infrastructure, what's the industry's capacity to actually absorb that and ensure that quality and timeliness is there?

Mr. Andy Manahan: Thank you for the question.

Attracting young people to the construction industry has been a primary focus of not only RCCAO but many other organizations. Right now, there's not a lot of new hiring, so if we see an uptick, I think our ability to complete those projects will be very high. I can't speak for every single municipality across Ontario, but certainly we're ready, willing and able.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Have you, or has anyone in the industry, put a dollar figure together as to what you think is needed from an infrastructure program?

Mr. Andy Manahan: A lot of people still refer to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities figure from 2007, that we need \$123 billion across the country. In the CANCEA research that I referred to earlier, we turn it on its head and use a percentage of GDP. Unfortunately, the federal government, in the research we've done, have been laggards at 0.4% of GDP, the province and municipalities are at about 2.3%, and the macroeconomic optimal is at over 5%. We actually need the federal government to pull up their socks, and we're hoping that happens. In addition, the Canada Infrastructure Bank should be playing a good role in that one, and quite frankly they could use pension funds, which are also ready to get higher rates of return through infrastructure investment.

It's not traditional government spending that we're looking at. I think we need to be innovative. Last year, the minister launched a program for unsolicited bids. We think that's going to be fantastic, and there was a lot of interest before COVID-19 happened.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I don't have any other questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time, and that concludes our list of presenters this morning. Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentations.

This committee stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1154 to 1300.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome back to our meeting for hearings on the infrastructure sector for the study of the recommendations relating to the Economic and Fiscal Update Act, 2020, and the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on certain sectors of the economy.

There's a bit of a change with our 1 p.m. presenter. The first presenter, Ontario Library Association, has cancelled for the 1 p.m. slot, and instead she'll be joining the 3 p.m. slot, along with the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. Also, one of our 4 p.m. presenters, Xplornet Communications Inc., will have a change of presenter. Steve Van Groningen will be joining, instead of C.J. Prudham.

Before we move on to our next presenter, I would like to do an attendance check. MPP Andrew, if you can please confirm your attendance. She's not—MPP Glover? No worries. We'll come back to them.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Glover, can you please confirm your attendance?

Mr. Chris Glover: Yes, it's Chris Glover, and I'm in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

LAFARGE CANADA
NU-TECH PRECISION METALS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Our first presenter this afternoon is Lafarge Canada. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Robert Cumming: My name is Robert Cumming, and I'm the head of environment and public affairs for Lafarge, eastern Canada. It's good to see you all, even remotely.

Lafarge Canada is Canada's largest building materials company. You may also know us in the Toronto area as Allmix and Innocon. Those are the brand names we use there.

With more than 6,000 employees in Canada and more than 200 sites in Ontario alone, our mission is to provide construction solutions that build better cities and communities. Most of you will have at least one of our sites in your ridings, and all of the hospitals, bridges, schools, homes, roads and public transit infrastructure were built with materials from our building materials sector.

There's more concrete sold per year than all other building materials combined. It's everywhere, so you don't see it. We produce cement, aggregates and concrete. "Aggregates" is a fancy word for stone, sand and gravel. And here's a tricky part: Cement is to concrete as yeast is to dough. If you don't remember anything else—it's not a cement sidewalk; it's a concrete sidewalk. These products are all essential building materials for Ontario's future.

One point I really want to emphasize is, we are local. Virtually all of our products are produced in Ontario, from Ontario resources, and often within 100 kilometres of their final use—this means local manufacturing jobs and also very well-paid skilled work.

COVID-19 hit us at a very bad time. In the winter, construction obviously is slow, so we take that opportunity to do maintenance on all of our facilities—we're spending millions of dollars and we're not selling much product, so it's a very cash-intensive time for us. Usually, we rely on emerging out of that with the spring and construction season beginning. But that's when, of course, COVID-19 hit us very hard.

Being capital-intensive, it doesn't take much for our billion-dollar cement plants, for example, to go from making money to losing millions of dollars. Everybody experienced the same thing here. We had the uncertainty of what this would mean. Could we actually operate safely? Will there be construction work going on? How long will it be out for? Because of the cash nature of our operations, we had to take some fairly aggressive action to lower our costs, to shut our facilities, and unfortunately, many employees were sent home on layoff. We also found that we had to cancel many of our projects last minute. Within three hours, we had to make decisions on whether to continue some of our own construction projects, like investments in our own plants. Because of supply chain uncertainties, would we be able to bring in the international experts we needed to commission this equipment? We

had to make sure that we could start up even under a quarantine state, as well.

What we're very proud of, though, is that our employees managed the safety issues extremely well. Our sector is very comfortable with risk management. As you know, construction is very labour-intensive and can be dangerous if it's not managed well. For our sector, this was just one more safety risk that we had to manage. Our teams turned very quickly. We developed all the methods and procedures that we needed to manage this additional safety issue. We've had very few, if any, cases in our company. It allowed us to be part of the province's recovery when we hit phase 1 and phase 2.

Construction infrastructure, we believe, will play a big role in getting people back to work and helping Ontario recover. We need to keep this work going throughout the entire construction season. Spending on safe construction and infrastructure, I want to remind you, is a local investment, for highly skilled workers, as well.

Looking forward, there are some international trends that we are experiencing, and I think as government, you will be experiencing similar kinds of trends. They will influence our future. Urbanization, a circular economy, decarbonization—these are three major trends our company is looking at. We have signed on to the United Nations Global Compact's "recover better" initiative. We believe there is an opportunity, as infrastructure spending will resume, to work with governments like yourselves to take advantage of that and continue to change the way we do things.

We are producing innovative, low-carbon products because our customers are asking for them. We are a circular-economy company because, simply, it's really good business. We recycle over two million—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes left.

Mr. Robert Cumming: Okay.

We recycle over two million tonnes a year in Ontario alone. We want to do more. It's good for our bottom line and keeps manufacturing jobs in Ontario, but we're stuck. We want to partner with your government on circular-economy and low-carbon solutions, but what is stopping us from innovating here in Ontario, like we do in Europe, is the use of performance standards—which doesn't sound very interesting, but it actually is important.

Government is a large customer for us. If you want an economy that is circular and avoids waste, you need to measure circularity and buy circular products. If you want an innovative economy, you need to buy innovative products. If you want a decarbonized, thriving economy, you need to buy low-carbon products. It's very simple.

Performance standards focus on the desired constructed performance of the product—safety, longevity, chemical resistance. You don't want your bridges to fall down, in other words. Currently, Ontario relies on a recipe-based methodology.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Robert Cumming: What we're asking is: Don't tell us how to make the chocolate cake; tell us what you want it to look and taste like, and we'll take it from there.

We encourage you to lead by adopting performance standards that drive innovation. It won't be easy. It took 10 years for the last innovation to be adopted, but we've seen with COVID-19 how governments rose to the occasion and what would have taken months and years took weeks. Working together, it can be done.

Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Our next presenter is Nu-Tech Precision Metals. Please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Mr. George Legate: My name is George Legate, and I'm the president of Nu-Tech Precision Metals.

Nu-Tech is a manufacturer of specialty metal pipe and tubing. We are a member of the Bruce Power Retooling and Economic Recovery Council. I'm here to offer support for the proposal for a loan from the federal government that would permit the acceleration of material to supply Bruce Power's reactor refurbishment, and to provide specific testimony regarding the impact on Nu-Tech and our supply base.

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Nu-Tech is the smallest company on Bruce Power's Retooling and Economic Recovery Council. We're located in Arnprior, Ontario, in Renfrew county. While we're the smallest company on the council, I think we arguably supply the most important component in the reactor: the pressure tube. There are 480 pressure tubes in the core of the Candu reactor. These tubes contain extremely hot, pressurized, radioactive heavy water, which is heated by the nuclear reaction. After about 30 years of operation, the pressure tube needs to be replaced, which is what's driving the need for refurbishing the reactors at Darlington and Bruce.

My company, Nu-Tech, has, since 1957, made every pressure tube installed in every Candu reactor everywhere in the world. We're the only supplier of zirconium pressure tubes for Candu reactors.

Like other members of the recovery council, we believe that by accelerating work on the Bruce Life-Extension Program, we can assist with Ontario and Canada's COVID-19 recovery efforts.

Over the last 18 years in particular, we have been able to leverage the equipment that's needed to make a pressure tube, along with our employees' skills, capabilities and expertise, to make products for other markets. We supply components made from zirconium for research in medical reactors around the world, and level 1 SubSafe stainless steel piping for the reactors in United States Navy nuclear submarines. We're a major supplier of titanium to the Boeing company. All of this business is exported. The point I want to make is that we aren't just recycling Ontario's electricity dollars in Ontario; we leverage that to bringing in foreign dollars to Ontario.

I want to now turn the focus from international to local. Renfrew county, which is where Nu-Tech is located, had, prior to COVID-19, one of the highest unemployment rates in the province; 9.8%, to be exact. A challenging, high-paid job in Renfrew county is highly valued, and

most, if not all, employees at Nu-Tech treasure what they have. This map shows where our employees call home. It's a wide area across Renfrew county. Of course, every one of those people, with their salary, is helping to stimulate their local economy in small towns across the Ottawa valley.

We're dependent upon a large and well-developed supply chain of about 290 suppliers across Canada, 130 of which are Ontario companies. We have a policy to spend as much as possible—millions per year—in Ontario, and particularly in Renfrew county and the surrounding area, including Ottawa. This slide shows our local supply base of over 75 local businesses.

While we're currently making about 800 pressure tubes a year, in August we're going to complete the pressure tubes for Bruce unit 6, which is the first unit being refurbished in this phrase. At the same time, we're working to complete the final unit, the fourth unit, for the refurbishment of OPG's Darlington plant. To do this, we had to hire and train an initial 20 people over the last three years. This December, the required tube production will drop to about 300 tubes a year to match Bruce Power's schedule for refurbishing the five units over the next 10 years. Unless a decision is made to accelerate supply, 20 workers skilled at making a product that is integral to Ontario's long-term energy supply will be laid off and our purchases from Ontario-based suppliers will fall, resulting in greater economic fallout; especially so as many of our suppliers are in an area of the province, Renfrew county, that's economically challenged in normal times.

Under normal circumstances, we'd be working to secure more business in other sectors—the largest is the aircraft sector. But demand has plummeted there. While that won't deter us from trying, the short-term prospects for business to replace the drop in pressure tube sales aren't good. In fact, we know existing sales to this sector will likely fall, resulting in even more layoffs.

There are still about 2,400 pressure tubes required to refurbish the Bruce units, and remember, Nu-Tech is the only supplier. A reactor can't be refurbished without a pressure tube. The province is going to need them. It's just a matter of whether a decision is made to buy them over the next four and a half to five years and boost the economy, instead of the planned nine to 10 years. To enable this—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. George Legate:—the proposal is for the federal government to provide a zero-interest loan to finance the early production of these tubes. The principal would totally be repaid when the tubes are sold. Continuing production at or near existing levels could be supported immediately and would serve as an immediate means of keeping money flowing through the economy, rather than reducing the flow of money—where we're headed now.

As I said, we're the smallest company on the council—but overall, the Retooling and Economic Recovery Council has estimated that accelerated production will support 3,700 jobs and \$1.2 billion to \$2 billion in economic activity between now and 2025. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start the first round of questions with the opposition. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the presentations from you both.

I'm going to start with Mr. Cumming. It's very interesting to hear from—in your case, a massive operation—businesses across the province as they are doing their best to be nimble. No offence; I don't know if anyone has called your business nimble before—but when you're referring to risk management, recognizing that you are, of course, having to work within a really strange time. So I applaud the work that you've been able to do—to tell a local story that I think is applicable on a broader scale.

We have neighbours who have not been able to build their decks and their porches and do some of their at-home improvements, as we're all at home now, because the contractors and the local construction folks are not able to source the cement products—or do I mean concrete? Anyway, they're not able to source what they need, there is an inability to get pressure-treated lumber etc. The building supplies at the neighbourhood level are a challenge, so I can only imagine what you're finding on your level. Could you speak a little more about not just the pressures you're finding, but how you're navigating it to ensure that the building materials you produce on a massive scale—how do we ensure that that flow keeps going, so that the construction projects can continue to happen when they start to happen?

Mr. Robert Cumming: Excellent question.

In a typical year, in the winter, construction is down; we shut our facilities down. We tend to end the years very full of inventory, so we can continue to provide any customers in the winter who need product. We do our maintenance. We can be down for six weeks or eight weeks, potentially, to do significant maintenance work, and then we start up and we tend to produce more than we sell for the first couple of months. When we hit the heavy construction period, our inventories tend to drop. When we hit September or October we're often just keeping up with demand, and then in November and December we're building an inventory again. That's a normal year. Because COVID-19 hit right at the start of March—and in Ontario, that's really when construction starts to pick up and we're in the middle of our maintenance outages—it was a real question for us. If there was going to be a significant hit and people might be out for three months, if we continued operating, then we'd maybe have no cash reserves left, and we'd be in serious trouble. If there was a short outage, we could be caught short when we start back up, because we lost that production time to get ahead of the curve.

That has been a challenge for us, so we're focusing on trying to manage through this year. It is touch and go with production issues, but we're confident that construction will continue throughout the rest of the year. We've developed the safety protocols. We did flatten the curve.

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The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Robert Cumming: So we're confident for the rest of the year. Now we've just got to keep up in terms of our production.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Barring catastrophe, you don't anticipate a challenge to being able to do that?

Mr. Robert Cumming: It's going to be challenging, but we think we're able to manage it. In terms of that balance between conservative and optimistic, a couple of months ago we were a little over-conservative, but we feel that we can keep up and meet the needs of Ontario.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: When you were speaking about the circular economy and being a part of it and looking to the future and working with this government as a partner, you had done well to frame, "If you want an innovative economy, you have to spend money with innovative partners" etc. Could you speak a little more in terms of specifics? What would you like the next steps to look like from this government, to be able to see that strong path forward in terms of being a circular-economy company?

Mr. Robert Cumming: For example, if we measure the recycled content of some of the products you purchase—you may wish to build a sidewalk or a road, and if you were to require a certain percentage of recycled aggregates in that mixture, it would then drive that innovation. Currently, it's not requested in procurement, so it makes it difficult for us to find outlets. When we're doing a deconstruction of an existing building, all that concrete rubble, for us to find a market for it can be challenging in some communities—not all communities. That's an example where government can drive the market for that type of operation.

Another example is: We're working on methodologies today to allow governments to have an embedded carbon content number. Think Energy Star—when you buy an appliance and its kilowatt hours per year. It's the same kind of thing. You could buy a cubic metre of concrete. How many kilograms of CO₂ are in there?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Robert Cumming: If governments were to buy low-carbon products and allow us to sell them, which seems obvious, that lowers our carbon emissions.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: You mentioned your many employees and that you have been through many phases of this. How are you now in terms of your workforce? Is there stability with those who were laid off? What is their circumstance?

Mr. Robert Cumming: Most of them are back. Just a handful are not yet back, but they are going to be called back. It's an interesting situation. We need drivers, for example. We don't have enough drivers for our trucks. At our construction sites, we're waiting for our production to build up.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the independent members now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to both presenters. I really appreciate the information you provided.

Mr. Cumming, I'm going to direct my first question to you. I think there's a lot of interest in building smarter,

more responsibly. I think your presentation has hit on that in many ways.

I just wanted to dig a little deeper on the circular-economy issue, especially your comments around recycled aggregates. It's my understanding that other jurisdictions, such as the UK, have a much higher recycling rate of things like aggregates. Could you dig in a bit more on what are some of the barriers in Ontario to utilizing recycled aggregate? How could we get some of that red tape out of the way so your industry could move in that direction?

Mr. Robert Cumming: I use recycled concrete as an example for some of the issues. What the concern can often be is that a smaller aggregate company may not have the expertise. They may not have the chemists and the processing expertise in order to reuse recycled concrete. Recycled concrete behaves differently than virgin aggregate, but it can be done. But if it's not done well, it could create problems. So if you're a municipal engineer or a provincial engineer with MTO, you may be wanting to ensure that your product is going to work and are reluctant to specify recycled concrete. It can be done, but you may be concerned that some of the smaller companies may not be able to produce it, or produce it well enough, and it just raises some risks. It requires a bit of a policy push, where there's a reward for innovation, low carbon, circular economy, so the engineers are driven in your organization to pursue those opportunities.

There are things we can do as an industry, as well—develop standards and methodologies so that even the smaller companies, for example, can produce a product with 10% recycled content and meet the performance requirements. We're happy to work on that as an industry. But, again, it's chicken and egg; if there's no demand for recycled concrete, then we're not going to put the training systems in place to help companies do it etc.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's my understanding, in some meetings I've had with the Ontario Good Roads Association, that in the case of road construction, for example, recycled content could potentially lower costs while still maintaining the same performance standards, provided you have a company that's able to achieve those performance standards. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Robert Cumming: Absolutely. That's bang on. There are actually significant carbon reductions, because you're reusing materials, you're keeping construction materials out of landfills, which is another benefit. You can sometimes lower costs if you're producing products in urban centres far from quarries. You can see the significant advantages to reprocessing concrete—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Robert Cumming: —that's already in the city of Toronto.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, it makes a lot of sense. It saves money and it's good for the environment at the same time, so I appreciate that.

You talked a little bit about the importance of performance-based standards, and you used the analogy of, "Don't tell us how to bake the cake; just tell us what

kind of cake you want." Can you elaborate a little bit more on that?

Mr. Robert Cumming: For example, there are things we can add to our concrete mixes which will give the same strength that you need. It's as simple as what's called the cement-water ratio. I don't want to get too technical, but if you're reducing the amount of cement, you're actually reducing the carbon content as well. But now you don't meet the cement-water ratio, even though you've adjusted for that with other materials. It doesn't meet the recipe for MTO, for example, or for other buyers.

We need to move to the place where you're measuring workability, strength, set times, chemical resistance, all that kind of stuff. If you can achieve it in a different, lower-cost, lower-carbon, higher circular-economy way, that would allow that kind of innovation. I think everybody in this session today wants Ontario to be innovative, but we need to create the policy framework to facilitate that.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: So if I could just sum up—and hopefully I'm accurate: Working with your industry, we could save money, lower costs and lower environmental impact and carbon emissions at the same time.

Mr. Robert Cumming: Yes.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate your time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We will move to the government side now. MPP Rasheed.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to both presenters this afternoon. I really appreciate your presentations.

My question is to Mr. Cumming. We all know that this pandemic has been really challenging for everyone out there, all industries out there; especially the construction industry. We have heard a lot from the construction industry, as well, about how they have been impacted with COVID-19.

You talked about some of your projects and how you had to lay off some of your employees. Since the province has started to reopen in phases—but also different stages and different regions—how do you see your industry moving with all these changes, especially this post-COVID-19 thing that we are facing at the moment?

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Mr. Robert Cumming: For our own projects, like modernizing our cement plants, for example, a decision was made to essentially cancel everything that could be cancelled. If we were more than halfway through in March, we would finish a project, but if it hadn't started, it was cancelled just as a matter of taking the time to reboot, so to speak, because once you spend the cash, you don't get the cash back, necessarily. So it was a very aggressive decision we made, which I think was the right one at the time.

A lot of those projects have now gone through the second approval process in our company and are started up again but just delayed to some extent. Some are going to be postponed even further, because we had to pick the best projects at this point, and some of the projects that were good but not the best are going to be delayed.

In terms of our expectations throughout the second half of the year, we are anticipating that there will be a lower

level of construction—5% to 10% is probably not unreasonable, from the economists that we're reading—and then next year we think it'll be picking back up a notch.

Before March, Ontario was exploding. There was a lot of activity. We had a really good couple of months, year over year. We were very well set up for a great year, and then the pandemic hit. It took the wheels off the truck, so to speak. We're now in a position of trying to reforecast what we think the needs will be going forward, and every project is being re-examined. Some are being brought back on and are under way today.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Some of the projects that you have just talked about—how many of those are currently in Ontario right now?

Mr. Robert Cumming: For our own projects, they would be all Ontario, at our sites. If we look at our business, as I said, we're local, the one difference being that cement is—cement plants are big, billion-dollar operations. There are only five of them in Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Robert Cumming: We ship all across Ontario, by rail and by truck. A lot of our plants are also on the water, on Lake Ontario. We export to Ohio, New York and Michigan. We import a little bit of cement from Michigan back into Ontario; one of our competitors does that. So our exports represent about 50% of our cement production, but concrete and aggregates are about 95% in Ontario for Ontario. So we are an exporting province for cement. Our international markets have remained open. The US is going through a similar situation, so we've seen a drop there, as well.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Would you say that prior to COVID-19, as you said, the businesses that are booming, especially in this province—would you say that the government made some positive changes in making it easy for businesses to operate in this province? Would you care to talk about some of the things that you have seen, positive changes towards businesses in this province?

Mr. Robert Cumming: Remember, we're construction-based. There are 80,000 people moving to the city of Toronto every year, with lots of growth in the city. All those condo towers—guess which company is providing the concrete? That's where I think we saw the biggest impacts. In the rural areas, we're growing steadily, but it's not the big boom that Ottawa and Toronto would have seen.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Some of your plans in terms of post-COVID-19—I just wanted to see where you see the industry heading towards. I'm sure there are going to be a lot of projects coming out post-COVID-19. So where do you see the industry moving?

Mr. Robert Cumming: We're definitely watching the federal and provincial infrastructure dollars. Federally, you may know there are going to be some tie-ins, so strings attached, for a green economy. We don't know what that looks like yet, but we are ready to go. We have our own

projects to decarbonize our plants if it were to become a possibility, and we are prepared to provide low-carbon concretes if a province, municipality or federal project requires that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the second round, and I'll start the second round with the independent members. MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, everyone, for your presentations.

Mr. Cumming, I was very interested in your thoughts around changing the specs on the product and the impact or the ability to have a circular economy. Have you done any work or estimates on how that changes the economics of some of these projects?

Mr. Robert Cumming: In most cases, the costs remain similar, or to the customer, the price would be the same. In some cases, it might be even a lower cost over time once more economies of scale kick in, so to speak. For example, we have a new type of product of cement called Portland-limestone cement. It's 10% lower emissions—so 10% lower carbon, 10% lower NO_x and 10% lower SO₂ emissions. With the same chemical characteristics, it can substitute one for one with Portland cement. We are operating at the same price even though it has some environmental benefits, if you will. I don't know if you heard me say it took 10 years to get one of our products approved. That's the product I'm referring to. It had been in place in Europe for decades prior.

What we're looking for is a partnership. I don't want to pick on municipal or provincial engineers; they're making sure your bridges don't fall down. But I think we have to find a way—if we're trying to innovate and modernize our economies, we can't be taking 10 years to do it. We have to work together—which is unusual, because here we are, a company who wants to sell you folks products, and you've got people there to make sure that those products work. But we have to work together on finding a way forward. We think performance standards rather than recipe standards will unlock a lot of potential and potential benefits with no extra cost to the customer—which is often governments, right?

Mr. Stephen Blais: I don't disagree with you at all.

Do you have alternative recipes ready to go? If tomorrow the government went to a performance-standards approach, are there recipes used in Europe or other jurisdictions that you have the materials and the capacity to put in place quickly?

Mr. Robert Cumming: Yes. I'll use carbon as an example. In Europe, carbon intensity is 20% lower than our Canadian cement, mostly because of a performance-standards approach.

I'll use another European example. Their fuels are often about 50% coming from low-carbon fuel sources. Things like construction and demolition wood, for example, can be used as a fuel source. In Canada and Ontario, less than 10% of our fuel comes from such sources. Recycled concrete in roads, for example, is very low here. There are municipalities where it's higher, but it could be higher across the board as well.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you.

My next question is for George at Nu-Tech. I'd heard of Nu-Tech, but I didn't realize how integral you were in nuclear power generation—just down the road from Ottawa, in Arnprior.

At the end of your presentation, I think you said that you were looking for an interest-free loan. Did I catch that right, or maybe you could clarify—

Mr. George Legate: That's correct. The council itself is looking for an interest-free loan from the federal government, which would fund the building of the products needed to refurbish the remaining units at Bruce Power and do it in the next five years instead of over the next 10 years. Essentially, all of the materials that are required by some 10 to 12 suppliers could be made over that period of time. The advantage to Bruce Power is that it de-risks their process, particularly in the case of a company like ourselves, where there is only one approved supplier.

1340

Mr. Stephen Blais: Why is it that the request is made to the federal government and not to the provincial government?

Mr. George Legate: I'm afraid I don't know—other than that the funding is believed to be available with the federal development bank, the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I don't have any other questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move to the government side now. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you to all the presenters today for your presentations. It's greatly appreciated.

My question is for you, Robert. Robert, I really enjoyed my time with Lafarge in Cobourg. I actually went out and spoke with them just prior to COVID-19 hitting. I spent a full afternoon out there. I'm really intrigued by what you're speaking about with recycled aggregate and what we can do, and your cake analogy.

Talk to me a bit about the role we can play vis-à-vis our municipalities. What I heard on the ground from Cobourg Lafarge folks was that some of the challenges were with that sort of red tape on standards at the municipal level, and then what we can do provincially to ensure, obviously, a high-quality product. Do you see a role, potentially—for things like highways, do you differentiate between highways and things if we want a new build to last longer? And then in what setting would you use the recycled aggregate?

Mr. Robert Cumming: That's a lot of questions. I'll try to remember them all.

Thanks for visiting our site in Cobourg. Red tape—I think someone asked me earlier. That is one area that has been very, very helpful. The government has been obviously sincere in trying to remove red tape. Performance standards is yet another example of red tape, if you will, where we're prescribing new product.

If you put yourself in the chair of a municipal engineer—it's like back in the days when Apple came in

and no one got fired for buying IBM, if you remember that. We need to have some kind of incentive for the engineers who are doing the right thing, looking after the safety of the infrastructure being built in their province or their municipality. How do they ensure that they get the products they need? We need to work together to get over that hump of making sure we're responsible, but also pushing towards recycled content, lower-carbon content—

Mr. David Piccini: Can we standardize that, do you think, across municipalities?

Mr. Robert Cumming: It could be done. For example, require 10% recycled content in all your concrete. There may be some specific applications where that may not work, but that's the kind of idea I'm referring to here—or providing that you'll pay a 3% premium if recycled content is higher, or you get more points in a bid system if you have recycled content. Just create the incentives to incentivize the municipal engineer or the provincial engineer.

It's the same thing with carbon content. By the end of this year, we'll have the systems in place for you to specify the maximum carbon content in the concrete you buy, for example, and as you drive that number down—that's not even a carbon-pricing question; that's more of a policy question—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Robert Cumming: —where you can achieve carbon reductions just by giving some form of incentive or preference to lower-carbon products.

Mr. David Piccini: Are there some settings—I'm just trying to get an idea—obviously rural, urban, northern etc., vis-à-vis the life cycle. Is this applicable on an equal life cycle for new versus recycled, or are there some settings where one would be greater?

Mr. Robert Cumming: Great question. Obviously, in the city of Toronto or any of the big cities where you've got a lot of construction debris and excess soils, for example, there are things we can do there, because we have the supply. If you take a small rural operation in northern Ontario, you just don't have the recycled content in that case. So it's harder to make that sort of thing happen in the northern areas. One-size-fits-all might be difficult to do. Directionally, it's the sort of thing that I think we can work on, and with performance standards there may even be opportunities to look to local, innovative minerals that may be available in northern Ontario but not somewhere else.

Mr. David Piccini: I'm just conscious here that obviously in larger cities we don't want that one-size-fits-all that could kill small local production in rural areas. I think you make an important point there, and whatever solution—because I fully support this, and a direction to reduce that red tape to ensure more recycled content, but in a manner where we're not handicapping our rural and northern communities, where we can do this in an equitable fashion. That can be done, though?

Mr. Robert Cumming: Yes. Really, my ask is, let's have that conversation. We can solve this problem together.

Mr. David Piccini: And have you found the government receptive, to date, on tackling the red tape and on having these sorts of worthwhile discussions?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Robert Cumming: We've had some really good discussions. COVID-19 hit, and it slowed things down for six months. I believe the desire is there to remove barriers to innovation and to growth.

Mr. David Piccini: No further questions, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the opposition side for their second round. MPP Glover.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'd like to thank both George and Robert for being here.

Robert, I'm just going to ask you a question, because Lafarge is also located in my riding, and I know my colleague has some questions for George.

I want to follow up on the discussion that's been happening with the innovation and lowering the carbon content of concrete. You said that 50% of the cement that you produce is exported. So if you develop these innovative technologies, does that increase your potential for exports?

Mr. Robert Cumming: If you look at the US—and it's better for your mental health sometimes not—if you look at what's happening there, there is a lot going on behind the scenes. We are finding that some customers in New York—for example, the municipalities, subnational entities—are actively working on trying to buy lower-carbon products. It's often at the city level.

If we're already five to 10 years advanced on implementing low-carbon technologies, we believe that's going to be a significant competitive advantage for Ontario cement plants that will maintain us through the next 10 to 20 years. The US guys are essentially catching up with us. I think it speaks well of our industry, because we've recognized that the cement industry needs to do something about its carbon emissions. We know that, so we're being very proactive on that. That's why we want you to buy our low-carbon products, because without that, it's not—

Mr. Chris Glover: Right. If Ontario governments, municipal and provincial or federal, are buying low-carbon products from you, it provides the incentive for you to develop the low-carbon technologies that then make you more competitive for export. So the regulation that you're asking for actually creates a competitive advantage, and at the same time maintains a level playing field in Ontario for all the cement manufacturers.

Mr. Robert Cumming: Yes.

Mr. Chris Glover: That's interesting. We keep bandying around the term “red tape.” In many cases, regulation is often looked at as red tape, but here you're saying that regulation can actually create the framework for developing innovation that will make us more competitive or make your company more competitive.

Mr. Robert Cumming: Buy innovative products. It's that simple.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll turn it over to MPP French.

Thank you for being here, both of you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Mr. Legate, thank you very much. Now it's your turn, if that's okay. I appreciate your presentation.

Certainly, as I've said earlier in this committee and I say all the time, I'm very proud to be from Oshawa and to have a strong manufacturing base in our community. So recognizing what you've been talking about with the employment and what that means to the community, the broader community and the supply chain—and being able to not just have that immediate employment, but in the future, and what that looks like.

I understand and appreciate that you're here offering support for that proposal to the feds—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

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Ms. Jennifer K. French: —that the Bruce Retooling and Economic Recovery Council have put forward. Recognizing that that is something being put to the feds, what exactly needs to happen from this province? So not just, “Sure, they think it's a good idea”—what is it that they need to do in order to advance that, please?

Mr. George Legate: Well, I think that since the electrical ratepayers of the province will be ultimately paying for the product, there's a certain amount of buy-in that's required from the Ontario government approving and seeing that this is a path to economic recovery—and certainly supporting Bruce Power, which has taken the lead in this initiative in dealing with the federal government. So I think it's twofold.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: You had talked a bit earlier about supporting Ontario suppliers. You can't do that if you don't have the contract, so to speak, or that plan going forward. You've got a lot of folks relying on you in that area. It's an area that's familiar; I'm originally from Winchester, so it's a neck of the woods that I have fond memories of. Of course, we want to see all of our communities across Ontario doing well.

In terms of that, then, I'm going to shift in a little bit of a different direction: How are your employees that you have right now who are making those plans faring with COVID-19? Are you able to provide what you need in terms of PPE and a safe workspace? Are you getting the support that you need, also, from the government partners to ensure those things happen?

Mr. George Legate: We are. We've been very fortunate. Up until now, we have had no change in our business models. We've been able to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. George Legate: —rearrange and reorganize our plant to maintain full employment, and really haven't missed a beat. Our shipments today are what they were pre-COVID-19.

What we're going to see is a big change starting in the fall. We know we're going to see declining volumes in our aircraft sales as Boeing lowers their aircraft build rates. They'll drop overall to about 60% of what they were. And then we're going to see—and this was planned all along—a drop in our nuclear sales as we move from supplying both OPG and Bruce Power to just supplying Bruce

Power, and only supplying Bruce Power to their current schedule, which carries through 10 years. So I think in our case, what this proposal does—what we're saying is that we'd like a zero-interest loan to allow us to do in four or five what we'd do over the next 10 years. The tubes would be purchased in that period of time by Bruce Power, and at that point the loan would be paid. That's essentially it.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time. Thank you to both of the presenters for your time and for your presentations.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTORS

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ONTARIO

COALITION

MUSKOKA LAKES

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll move along to our next group of presenters, for 2 p.m. First, I would like to start with Associated Equipment Distributors. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Brian McGuire: Thank you. I'm Brian McGuire, and I'm the president and CEO of Associated Equipment Distributors. I'm joined by our vice-chairman, Craig Drury, from Vermeer Canada.

Associated Equipment Distributors, also known as AED, is the international trade association representing companies that sell, rent, service and manufacture construction, mining, farm, energy, forestry and industrial equipment and related supplies. When you see a yellow backhoe on the side of a highway, it has likely been sold by one of our members.

AED's Canadian members account for more than \$8.7 billion in annual sales and services and employ over 27,000 workers at 400 locations across Canada. Unfortunately, similar to many other industries, heavy equipment dealers have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the uncertain economic future exacerbates the situation. Many dealers had to lay off staff amid significant revenue declines, with construction projects stopping or being delayed and many private industries halting their operations, such as the energy and mining sector. Demand for our members' equipment has also dropped.

With the economy reopening, our members are hopeful for the future. However, many of our members continue to struggle amid the uncertainty surrounding infrastructure projects. According to ConstructConnect, there are over 600 projects in Ontario that continue to be delayed.

Thank you again for your time and consideration of my remarks.

I will now ask AED's distinguished vice-chairman, Craig Drury, to highlight some of AED's recommendations to support Ontario's economic recovery.

Mr. Craig Drury: Thanks, Brian, and thank you to the committee.

I'm the vice-president of operations for Vermeer Canada. We are head-officed in Stoney Creek and have

multiple locations across Ontario and the rest of the country. I'm honoured to represent AED here as the vice-chairman.

As Brian mentioned, the construction industry and other markets that we service are still struggling to recover. However, we believe that with the government's support, they will be able to more quickly recoup and support Ontario's economic recovery.

First, we would like to thank the government for its continued investments in public infrastructure, including a recent \$2-billion announcement to expand highways in St. Catharines. Investing in infrastructure is one of the best ways for a government to stimulate the economy. Research has shown that the return on investment of every dollar spent on public infrastructure is between \$2 and \$4. As the government begins to put together a plan to stimulate the economy, we would urge you all to continue investing in infrastructure. Not only will it create immediate employment opportunities, but infrastructure also benefits every Ontarian. Be it a resident of Vaughan taking the TTC subway downtown to Toronto or a resident of Thunder Bay driving down a new road to work, every Ontarian can benefit through infrastructure investments.

Second, we would like to thank the government for ending the process of streaming within high schools. This process certainly discriminated against certain groups, but it especially diminished the opportunity for apprenticeships and skilled trades. As we know now, Ontarians can make a good living in the skilled trades, where thousands of jobs continue to be available to those who are properly trained. This is why we believe the government must continue to promote the skilled trades as a first-choice career and invest in apprenticeships. By increasing the construction workforce, we can better respond to the billions of dollars being invested in infrastructure and have more capacity to service our customers' equipment.

Lastly, we would like to urge the government to continue investing in rural communities. This includes investments in rural broadband, which the pandemic has shown us is necessary. Every Ontarian deserves to be able to connect to high-speed Internet and take advantage of the digital economy. Connecting more people will both help to create construction jobs and stimulate the economy over the long term with greater digital participation.

Part of investing in rural Ontario also includes a focus on natural resource development. We know that successive governments have studied how to develop the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario, and there continue to be barriers to putting shovels in the ground. However, we would like to urge the government to fast-track its engagement activities to find solutions that benefit all parties involved. Responsibly developing the Ring of Fire can benefit Indigenous communities and the mining and construction sectors. It will also benefit every Ontarian through greater province-wide economic growth and job creation.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Mr. Craig Drury: To conclude, we would like to thank the government and all members of provincial Parliament for their work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the government plans the stimulus measures, we would encourage it to invest in infrastructure, skilled trades training, rural broadband and natural resource development. Working with the construction sector and affiliated sectors will allow the province to economically recover more quickly and allow Ontarians to again prosper.

Thank you, and we'd be happy to take any questions.

1400

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

Our next presenter is Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition. I know you're still waiting for one presenter, but do you want to start or do you want to wait for the third presenter?

Unmute, please. Green Infrastructure?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We can hear you now.

Ms. Deborah Martin-Downs: Now I'm unmuted. I was assuming you guys were unmuting us. Sorry about that.

Good afternoon, Chair Sandhu and members of the committee. My name is Deborah Martin-Downs, and I'm the chair of Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition. I'm here today with our GIO co-founder, Steven Peck, who is having trouble—I'm not sure if he's on yet; I can't see him—and our executive director, Jennifer Court. We want to thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

To provide a little bit of context, GIO is an alliance of organizations that share a common vision for a healthy, green Ontario where the economic, social, environmental and health benefits of green infrastructure are fully realized. We are led by a steering committee made up of nine GTA provincially based organizations, as well as general membership of approximately 35 other organizations, which represent various facets of the green infrastructure sector. Basically, those sectors include landscape and horticultural businesses, green roofs and walls, stormwater management, urban forests, parks, natural heritage, as well as cross-sectoral government and non-government organizations such as municipalities and conservation authorities—of which that is my day job.

To make sure we're on the same page, I just want to explain what I mean when I say "green infrastructure." It's not windmills and sewage treatment plants. Our standard definition is that green infrastructure includes natural vegetative systems and green technologies that collectively provide society with a multitude of economic, environmental, health and societal benefits. That means that, essentially, green infrastructure is provided by natural systems like wetlands, forests, parks, meadows; enhanced assets like stormwater infrastructure, rain gardens, bioswales or even storm ponds; and then urban parks and trees, as well as engineered assets like permeable pavement, green roofs and walls, rain barrels and cisterns that support green infrastructure. This definition is consistent with what we use in the Ontario provincial policy statement, and we were instrumental in getting that into that plan.

I'm going to turn it over to Jen now to talk about the benefits of green infrastructure and the impacts of COVID-19 on the sector and the role that green infrastructure can play in our economic recovery.

Ms. Jennifer Court: Thank you. I am Jennifer Court, GIO's executive director.

Green infrastructure assets are increasingly recognized for the multiple benefits that they provide, including stormwater management, air quality improvements, urban heat island mitigation, improved energy efficiency in buildings, providing space for recreation and active transportation, and more. What's more, these solutions are often lower-cost than traditional infrastructure. That's what I really want to focus on today—the economic benefits, particularly job creation.

GIO recently published an economic impact assessment of the green infrastructure sector in Ontario. This first-of-its-kind study defined the activity that makes up the sector and found that green infrastructure is an important contributor to Ontario's economy, generating \$8.6 billion in gross outputs, \$8.3 billion in GDP contributions and creating approximately 122,000 jobs in 2018. Some of the most exciting findings from this study related to jobs, as well as to the local nature of the supply chain. Investment in green infrastructure stays in the province and often within the immediate community.

Activity within the sector and across the sub-sectors is made up of many different industries and a wide range of jobs, including design in planting, engineering, planning, maintenance, building contractors, suppliers; including equipment manufacturers and growing nurseries, as well as conservation authorities, land trusts, environmental not-for-profits and roles within local and Indigenous governments. In comparison with sectors with similar GDP contributions, the green infrastructure sector created three to five times more jobs.

The study also looked at the growth potential of the sector over the next 10 years. Based on current trends, the sector is projected to grow 22%; however, with increased investment of just 15% of infrastructure funding directed specifically towards green infrastructure—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jennifer Court: —that number jumps to 73%, with a direct GDP contribution of \$10 billion and more than 146,000 jobs.

What these scenarios highlight is the significant impact of meaningful investment in the sector. The impact is particularly relevant as we think about our recovery from the economic fallout of COVID-19.

The closing of certain sectors and other restrictions that were put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 had a variety of profound impacts on the green infrastructure sector. I'll provide just a few examples.

The landscape horticulture sector was able to avoid approximately \$400 million in losses of perishable plant materials that were ready for sale as the restrictions on that subsector were lifted. However, many large-scale planting events, including tree planting events, were cancelled due to physical distancing requirements and logistical challenges.

The parks subsector has also experienced significant impacts. COVID-19 highlighted the lack of available green space compared to demand, as well as the stresses on municipal park budgets. As our population grows, these problems will only get worse.

Our recent report *State of Large Parks in Ontario's Golden Horseshoe* showed that we would need 15,000 hectares of new parkland by 2041 to maintain the current level of parkland per person. That's like adding 94 High Parks to our system. To continue to provide safe access to outdoor spaces, investment is needed.

What all of these findings show is that investment in green infrastructure is win-win-win. It creates good local jobs, supports climate resilience and provides a variety of benefits that make Ontarians happier and healthier.

We would like to see dedicated funding for living green infrastructure to support our economic recovery from COVID-19 as well as to support our longer-term economic and environmental well-being. Specifically, we recommend that 15% of infrastructure funding be dedicated directly to living green infrastructure.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Jennifer Court: Our industry needs a reliable source of long-term funding to be able to plan and execute projects routinely. Not only does green infrastructure create good jobs, support local supply chains, and all of the other benefits that I had mentioned, but green infrastructure can also reduce capital and operating costs for municipalities to provide essential services. These benefits to municipalities are particularly relevant now that municipal budgets are being so severely impacted by the need to manage the COVID-19 crisis.

It's always a great idea to invest in green infrastructure, but it's particularly important as a part of our economic recovery.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide these remarks today.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Our next presenter is the Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Norah Fountain: I'm Norah Fountain, executive director of the Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce and past project manager for the Muskoka Lakes-Wahta First Nation community broadband project. With me is Neil Smellie, wireless operations manager for Lakeland Networks in Bracebridge. Lakeland rolled out the first one-gig internet service in Ontario.

Thank you to the standing committee for the opportunity to speak today regarding infrastructure and the impact of COVID-19; specifically, about broadband. The virus has certainly magnified this issue.

Together with partners across Ontario, we've worked on bringing better broadband to our region since 1997. That's when Canada boldly announced that we would be the most connected country in the world. As you know, we haven't reached that goal, and COVID-19 is shining a strong light on how badly we need better connectivity across Ontario.

In 2003, our chamber presented Industry Canada with a robust fibre-wireless combined solution. We were told that our plan was one of the best ever presented, but it wasn't in a big enough region to spend \$3 million on. We had raised a matching \$3 million. Since then, millions more have been spent in northern Ontario, yet the job is far from done.

My point is that we must spend, but we must get smarter and more strategic on how we do it. Better spending will have an immediate benefit to our recovery, our economy overall, our communities, and help Ontario businesses compete on a global scale. I'll come back to that.

Seventeen years later—and I'm hoping this call doesn't drop as I Zoom in from Bala—we have less than one-meg upload and less than four-megs download. As you know, the national minimum standard is 50/10. We're nowhere close.

Even speed measures, though, can be a little misleading. Capacity needs to be considered, as well. There isn't enough capacity when several people are online on existing systems. It's like the Don Valley parking lot during rush hour; everything stops. I run two separate ISP systems in my office: public WiFi for those who have no Internet, and we had to install a second system for us so we could continue to do business. When we can't conduct standard business like uploading large files or doing software updates, we drive to neighbouring Bracebridge, an hour away, where the Internet is a lot better.

1410

I'm also a liaison to the Muskoka recovery task force, which has stated that broadband is the number one item that needs to be fixed in order for economic recovery post-COVID-19. We've seen an influx of people who would like to be here, but a lack of decent broadband stops them in their tracks. If we don't do something soon, that economic growth potential will go elsewhere—outside Ontario, perhaps.

Everyone gets stuck on the cost. I could speak about the economic costs of not doing it. I'll spare you that; COVID-19 has demonstrated that for us. This might surprise you, but I think that even if the provincial and federal governments were to increase their funding twentyfold, it might not fix the problem. Why? Because over the past 20 years, we haven't done broadband builds correctly or equally. Instead, we treat it like a luxury item to be sold only to those in denser areas who can get it and afford it, and areas of easier ROI providers. Don't get me wrong; I understand that they're not in business to lose money. I don't blame them for being selective. Unless incented properly and with the right criteria that make access for all embedded in your program, your money might not help close this infrastructure deficit at all, just like funding models have failed to be inclusive in the past.

The broadband rollout model across Canada is broken. COVID-19 has shown us that we need to fix it, and Ontario could lead the way.

I have three asks for you today. One is for you to recognize and declare broadband as essential, basic infrastructure like roads. Not everything can be a profit centre,

and if you continue to fund ISPs for specific projects only—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Norah Fountain: —there has to be recognition that some areas will not be profitable. As well as chasing low- and medium-hanging fruit, they should have to show how they're also working to be all-inclusive.

Plus, we have to recognize the urban-adjacency problem across Ontario. Mapping may show service in one spot; you can throw a rock and the house next to it can't get service.

In the case of downtown Bala, you need to overbuild, because our broadband is so behind here.

Our recommendation: Fund community broadband networks who partner with municipalities and ISPs in private-public broadband ventures, so no one gets left behind. I'm pleased to not let Bell and its marketing machine tell you that they've got the problem solved. They don't and won't.

Two: We have to speed the process up. Streamline the application and funding processes. Cut the red tape. I've watched ISPs get grants and go out of business waiting for the public funding announcement and money to flow, or entire programs get cancelled before shovels hit the ground. That's something for you to be careful with regarding ICON. You want shovel-ready projects, but will you be able to act fast enough to get those shovels moving? And will those projects include everyone in their geographic area?

Three: The province's ICON program is welcomed, and 25-cent dollars might work in areas of population density, but it doesn't solve the problems in rural or urban-adjacent areas where people deserve equal access. You've heard the stories of data usage and costs soaring these past few months. The ask is that we need closer to 100% funding if we're going to get anyone to build out more inclusively. I don't like the term "last mile."

Certainly, COVID-19 has shown us that no matter where you live, you need Internet access for school, for telehealth, for government meetings, for pretty much everything, and as an essential service rather than a luxury service, we need to spend public dollars to get it right. Before COVID-19, some of our small rural businesses were getting along with their cellphone—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Norah Fountain: —but that's no longer an option. Reliable true high-speed at the minimum set has moved from being a luxury to a necessity. We can't wait for another pandemic to watch more businesses close because they can't compete, or discover yet again that some kids can't do school online. We certainly can't wait for supposedly new solutions coming down the pipe. Our businesses have told us, "You want us to pivot to digital, to e-commerce, but I don't even have broadband service to my business." That's what they tell us. For them, there is simply nothing to pivot to.

Thank you for your time and consideration today. Neil and I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll start this round of questions—okay, before we do that, I need to do an attendance check. MPP Vanthof, if you can please confirm your attendance.

Mr. John Vanthof: John Vanthof here, just outside Temiskaming Shores.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll start the first round of questions with the government side. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to all the speakers. I have questions for all of you, if I have time—it has been interesting hearing all of you—but I'll start off with the Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce.

I listened intently to your concerns about broadband. We had Minister Laurie Scott in here this morning speaking to that, and that was really the main topic she touched on. It's something that our government takes very seriously and that is very topical. I think you are correct in that COVID-19 has shone a light and magnified some of the problems, whether it's schools, families, businesses etc. and how they can function when they need access to broadband and Internet.

It was mentioned, as well, that we've invested \$150 million in broadband infrastructure just recently. That's the tip of the iceberg; I know a lot more needs to be done.

My question to you is from a business point of view. I understand that if kids in school have better access, they can study better. I understand that families and loved ones can stay connected. From a business point of view, what are the economic benefits to the businesses in your region if they have better access? How is this going to be a multiplier to GDP?

Mr. Neil Smellie: I think a lot of businesses now, in order to even function, are moving to cloud-based systems. Sourcing of supplies and services are all moving to cloud-based systems. We find that businesses that are, say, in a more urban area, like Bracebridge, Ontario, that have access to fibre, have an advantage over even some of the same companies that have offices out of the smaller towns.

It's simply a fact that without broadband, a lot of businesses cannot function at all, to the point that we've seen businesses actually move because of the lack of broadband. I think that it's really a basic need. It's required for the day-to-day functioning of any modern-day business.

Ms. Norah Fountain: We could also probably get you numbers on GDP across Ontario—for the need for broadband.

Remember, we're not talking about existing broadband; we're talking about areas that don't have any at all, so they can't possibly do the things we've asked of them during COVID-19 to pivot to different digital solutions.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Yes. You've probably had businesses that will not go to your region, as an example, because of that lack of connectivity.

Mr. Neil Smellie: Absolutely.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: My next question is to the Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to be at the town of Oakville, where I'm the MPP. We had the largest investment in Oakville

Transit's history with building new electric buses—a lot of great announcements there for the community and for public transit. I was pleased to be a part of that. This is certainly something we take very seriously, as well, in terms of green infrastructure.

What I wanted to understand from you and your point of view is, what is the most in-demand area for green infrastructure? Is it transit? What is the area that you foresee as the biggest opportunity and the biggest need for investment?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jennifer Court: Thanks for asking.

First of all, I'd like to make a distinction between the exciting new transit announcements and the type of green infrastructure that we're talking about. As Deb highlighted, the distinction is really around the word "living." While new transit, EVs and renewable energy are all great sustainable projects, the distinction that we make is that we're talking about, typically, living green infrastructure solutions.

Within that framework, I would say the most in-demand projects are related to flood mitigation and stormwater management. A variety of solutions, like low-impact development, in combination with things like rain gardens, bioswales, stormwater ponds and wetland remediation, are all used at various scales in order to manage stormwater on-site, purify that water and take the pressure off of municipal storm water systems, preventing things like revenue loss from flood events, home and basement flooding, and wear and tear on traditional infrastructure, and also things like combined sewage overflows.

There are a lot of benefits associated on the stormwater side, as well as the health, aesthetic and recreational co-benefits that are associated with those projects. They also tend to be less expensive than stormwater management traditional solutions, like building new pipes and culverts and doing those traditional management strategies.

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Mr. Stephen Crawford: How much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute and 30 seconds.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Okay. My last question will be for the Associated Equipment Distributors. I'm the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure. We want to zero in on where we think the most need is for infrastructure in Ontario. I just wanted to get your thoughts on where you see the most need.

Mr. Craig Drury: That's a great question, because the list is long. From our perspective, we certainly would echo the broadband conversations. I think some of the green infrastructure on some of the harder jobs, as well—I don't know how we could nail that answer down in 30 seconds here, because they're all important, for sure. The real key for us is to get people working and to make sure that the workforce is there to do these projects efficiently when they do come up and that the funding is there to do them.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: If a lot of these projects are going ahead, do we have the availability of the skilled

workers right now to be able to meet this demand? That's another issue.

Mr. Craig Drury: The quick answer to that is, no, we don't.

Brian, you might be able to help me with some numbers here for skilled technicians who come into our business, as an example—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll have to move to the opposition side now. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I would like to thank all of the folks for their presentations. We appreciate that we've been hearing a couple of interesting themes today, but it's the first time today that we've actually been reminded about getting new workforce in, in terms of the schools and really bringing folks into the skilled trades.

My first question is going to be to Brian and Craig, please. I'd like you to speak a little bit more about that, as you were just saying that there's a need to get people working but you need to make sure the workforce is there. You appreciated the announcements and the changes to streaming. I'll put a little asterisk there and say there's a lot of detail that has to happen or that has to be furthered in that realm.

I hope you can share some of your insight with the government on how to encourage students to enter into programs that would well serve them and make them be poised for the workforce. If you could speak a little bit more about that, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Brian McGuire: I think it's important for the government to emphasize the contribution that these careers make to society. These are well-paid careers that are often overlooked. Folks who work in these industries are large contributors to society, and these are good-paying jobs that allow them to provide a very comfortable lifestyle. I think helping the industry advertise those opportunities helps bring new folks into the workforce, and that's one thing the government can help the industry do.

The second part I'll leave for Craig.

Mr. Craig Drury: I'd like to add to that. As an industry, we are working, for example, with Banting high school in Alliston and Bear Creek in Barrie to drive some awareness to our industry. It's difficult to get governmental support for these programs to get kids interested, and the streaming piece—our thought is that we tend to get the college-stream kids into the programs for this, but that, I think by default, removes some of the people in the university streams, who we could also use in our industry. So we're hoping that this streaming will open up the doors a little bit to get into what we do.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: You had mentioned barriers to putting shovels in the ground. Can you give a specific example that the province right now can make a change to make a difference—or is it too big with COVID-19? Is there something specific you could mention?

Mr. Craig Drury: Our customers would probably be able to answer that question a lot better—the construction

companies that are actually doing it. But I will tell you that our experience—and this is where there may be some leadership—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Craig Drury: —that the government could apply in this, is, just help to get the COVID-19 stuff that has to happen on a job to flow a little bit better. How do you social distance on a construction project—just some education pieces to make some efficiencies go through this COVID-19 time we're in.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: For my next question, I'd like to turn to the Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition. I know that you had another person who was going to be presenting who didn't make it, so I wondered if there was any other piece that you wanted to add to your presentation.

Ms. Jennifer Court: Thank you for asking. I do think that the question posed by MPP Crawford really opened the door for that.

I think stormwater management is a really critical piece of the green infrastructure puzzle. There are a lot of projects that are currently ready to go, shovel-ready, on that front and could really benefit from investment.

Building on the answers of some of the other questions posed here so far today: I think there is a workforce ready to do this kind of work, and there are a lot of projects that are poised and ready to go. The sector would also really benefit from funding to support readiness. I think, particularly at the municipal level, a lot of municipalities have an appetite to do green infrastructure work, but because it is a little bit newer in some cases—or sometimes practitioners don't necessarily know where to get started. In some cases, there's a real opportunity to incentivize work by funding GIS mapping, readiness assessments and asset-management valuation to get things going.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Jennifer Court: I'll offer Deb, or Steven, who is on the phone, the opportunity to chime in. Steven, in particular, wasn't able to participate in the presentation—oh, Deb has something.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm going to interrupt you. I was hoping to hear from Steven if there was something additional, but I would love to also find out more about the green stream applications and stuff—if you're working with people who are waiting for approvals.

Go ahead, Steven.

Mr. Steven Peck: The thing is, there is already a huge workforce working in green infrastructure in Ontario, which we recently described in great detail in a study that we commissioned. I think if the goal of the government is to get the economy going and multiply the benefits of infrastructure investment, then doing things like urban reforestation, wetland restoration, green roofs, bioswales—all of those things pay off in multiple ways financially. They pay off by reducing the risk from extreme weather events, which we're seeing—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll have to move to the independent members now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to all three presenters for coming in and providing excellent presentations.

Steven, I'm going to go Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition in a second, and I'll let you finish your thought there.

Before I do that, I want to ask Norah and Neil a question. You talked about the importance of making sure that we not only make a financial investment, but that we also spend that money correctly and do it in a smart way. But I've also heard frustration from a number of folks around lack of access to money to get things off the ground.

I know the government oftentimes says, "The federal government is holding up the money that they've allocated." Then I complain to my federal members. My MP, I complain to him about it, and the federal government says, "Oh, the province isn't approving the projects. We've allocated the money, and they're not approving the projects." So I just sometimes throw my hands up in the air and say, "Can we figure this out to get the money flowing?" I'm just wondering how you're feeling about that.

1430

Ms. Norah Fountain: I'm going to ask Neil because he's right in the trenches.

Mr. Neil Smellie: I think we do see a level of frustration.

We just participated in the CRTC funding application, and we've submitted an application. We are now pivot-working on an application for the Ontario broadband program. Our confusion lies in, do we apply for the same areas on two different programs? Do we look at different areas for different programs?

I think there's a deeper-seated problem.

We have a project right now that we do not need additional funding for. We're doing a fibre-to-the-home project in Sundridge, Ontario. The project is about \$400,000 in capital that Lakeland has and is willing to spend on it. It will connect fibre to the home for a couple of hundred residents there. It's a much-needed area in northern Ontario.

We went to Hydro One—and I'm sure this is not the first time you're hearing about pole access and some of the regulations that are Ontario regulations, but we went to make our applications for pole access with Ontario Hydro, which is the owner of the poles. The upgrades and make-readies for that project are over \$1 million on a \$400,000 project. It all of a sudden makes it not a commercially viable project.

We sometimes feel that when doing broadband infrastructure, we are paying for upgrades for infrastructure for other utilities like hydro. We have to pay for the new pole. We have to pay for the engineering. We get our stuff on it, if we can make it financially viable, and still are subject to one of the highest rates per pole for attachment fees. So some of those things are frustrating.

We see a lack of focus in the broadband. We appreciate the broadband programs that are brought forward, but we do see it would be easier for us to—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Neil Smellie: —put a project forward to all of the various levels of government and see where our project falls from a funding point of view, rather than this guessing game of multiple applications.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I can feel your frustration.

I want to switch over to Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition. You talked about how a dollar invested in green infrastructure creates three times more jobs than a similar dollar invested in grey infrastructure, if I understood that correctly. You already employ 122,000 people. If you could just capture even 15% of Infrastructure Ontario funding, you could look at a 73% growth. Did I get those numbers correct? Did you want to elaborate on those opportunities a bit more?

Mr. Steven Peck: Well, that's true. The benefits are quite significant in the studies that we've done. The reason for the intense job creation per dollar spent is because a lot of these jobs are not capital-intensive or technology-intensive; they're human-resource-intensive. Because they're human-resource-intensive, they generate more opportunities in Ontario. From Cornwall to Sault Ste. Marie to Niagara Falls, right across the province, we have people working in this sector. So from a political point of view, from a job creation point of view, from a benefits point of view, living green systems, green infrastructure systems, which involve manufacturing locally and growing and engineering and construction—those types of projects have a tremendous potential benefit for the province.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Do you know what percentage of infrastructure funding you receive right now?

Ms. Jennifer Court: I don't have an exact number on the percentage that we receive right now. It's a little bit difficult to parse that out, because the green stream, which is a good funding source that addresses green infrastructure, also includes those more traditional infrastructure solutions, like conventional stormwater and waste water treatment, that we mentioned before. So while we know about the total amount of money that's going through that stream, it's hard to parse out which funding goes specifically to living green infrastructure.

I'll say that you did have those numbers more or less right. The jobs numbers—there are three to five times more jobs than comparable sectors. And yes, 15% of that infrastructure funding, whether it's separating out dedicated funding for living green infrastructure from the green stream or a separate fund dedicated to living green infrastructure, would lead to a 73% growth—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

I'll start the second round with the opposition. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm going to share my time with MPP Vanthof in just a moment.

To the Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition folks: I would like to have you round out that thought about the green stream.

Also, I did want to say, with the work that all of us are doing across our communities with the conservation authorities and different folks, there are some pretty awesome, innovative—there's real potential. As you've said, COVID-19 has highlighted the lack of green space versus demand. So I think there's some real opportunity there, not just for shovel-ready or shovel-worthy, but also no shovel—doing something differently that isn't necessarily digging into that lovely green earth.

If you'll answer that—and then I'm going to ask some questions of the Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce folks.

Ms. Deborah Martin-Downs: I'd like to weigh in on this one.

The green stream did actually allow our industry to access some funding. But there hasn't been a reliable and consistent funding stream for green infrastructure. If we can't plan for the projects, there's no pipelines of projects, or the pipeline gets truncated, or they're sale-dated. We need to know that there's a pipeline.

Then, on the parks side: In my day job, we run conservation areas. We've been slammed, but there are some mechanical things we can do, like timed entry, maybe one-way trails and adding more trails, that really don't take a lot of extra work. But there isn't any funding to do that, especially right now, when we can't even have our parks open and accept our fees for that.

The recreational stream has been missing in any funding sources in the last few years; in my history in the conservation authority movement, for example. We don't get a chance to access development charges or anything like that. It peeled the layer back on the onion, and it said we need to have a bit more access to green space, both in acquisition and development of parks and then management and maintenance of those facilities for the future.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm going to take my turn quickly with the Muskoka Lakes Chamber of Commerce folks. I've got a letter here I won't read to you, but I know MPP Vanthof was one of the signatories on it. All of the northern opposition MPPs were taking up the torch on the broadband conversation. It's certainly one that we're all very involved in—ensuring that northern and rural communities actually get funding.

Talking to the minister this morning, she really did say that spending is going to depend on partnerships—I think she said “counting on industry partners”—which makes me nervous when we see the FAO report; \$31.8 million in broadband infrastructure was left on the table, according to their facts and figures.

What would it mean to you if you're dependent on industry partnerships? Is industry banging on your door to invest in your community if you don't have broadband?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Neil Smellie: I think we can attract more industry with better broadband. I think we see that in the more urban areas, such as Bracebridge, Huntsville and Gravenhurst, which have access to decent fibre Internet. They

have a distinct advantage over Port Carling and Bala and some of the other areas.

From an investment point of view, certainly my company has some capital to invest, and we are looking for municipal partners. There are projects that we build each and every day with our own capital, but we do have areas where we need the help of some sort of funding partner.

I will say the municipalities, to a great extent, when we're building our infrastructure—where there's access to road allowances, sides of roads for fibre builds, community centres for us to install towers—have been excellent partners. That is not always in the form of a cheque, but in-kind contributions help us hugely when we're building broadband. The municipalities have been excellent and responsive to any asks we've had.

1440

Ms. Jennifer K. French: We've certainly heard that municipalities are doing their darndest, but the money isn't coming out of thin air, as everyone understands.

MPP Vanthof.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Vanthof.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you to all of the presenters.

I'd like to go right to the Muskoka Chamber of Commerce. Up where I am in Temiskaming Shores—just outside—we feel your pain. I just changed Internet providers. They put up a tower within sight of my lot, and I no longer have to bum WiFi off the Temiskaming Shores chamber of commerce. We know how important—it's something you said about the last mile. We have to start treating broadband like it's an essential service, because we can't expect—private companies need to make money. There's not a problem with that.

I'm a farmer by trade. If we had installed our hydro system like we're doing with broadband, my farm likely never would have gotten hydro.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. John Vanthof: Would you agree that it should be an essential service?

Ms. Norah Fountain: Absolutely, it needs to be essential, and we have to not leave orphans on the table. That's why we need to look at the entire area. Forget the last-mile concept. Everyone needs it. If we build out and leave a doughnut hole, those five to 10 houses along that street will never get service because the mapping will show that the area is serviced.

We also have to get all the governments in line. We need Canada, Ontario, and right down to municipalities. We've been fortunate in our municipality, because they have worked with them, but in others, they charge development fees—and everything that makes it impossible to get the work done, right down to needing arborists' agreements to sign off on builds. While that's important, because I wouldn't want to upset our green coalition people, we need to look at that. We have to get in line because we're not. We're still—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off.

We'll move to the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to say thank you to all of the presenters.

Let's continue on the theme of broadband. I really like your premise of making it available to everyone and that when it is available in an area, we're not leaving people out. I was speaking with the Scarborough Business Association, and they actually are pushing for that connection. Even though fibre is adjacent, if you don't have the connection going into your business or home, it is not doing you any good, because it's just cost-prohibitive to run your own line to connect with the fibre. I think that the conversation we're having here is very timely.

We just heard today from the Minister of Education about half of high school students being required to study online. What happens if you're in a rural or remote location in Ontario? How are you going to achieve those learning objectives? So it is very important as we move forward, this type of infrastructure—it's important to get it right as we're putting policies forward that demand more and more access.

Do you want to speak to that, Norah or Neil?

Mr. Neil Smellie: I think you've hit the nail on the head. I think that's evidenced in our area by the number of cars in the parking lots of Tim Hortons and McDonald's in our more urban areas. We've certainly done some work with some of the municipal libraries and that sort of thing to enhance broadband at public access points. Part of our partnership with municipalities is to enable community centres to have that sort of service.

In our own area, we have areas where we can build without government funding, and we are building as quickly as we can without the government. There are areas where a 25% subsidy might be the right number. In other areas, 50% might be the right number. In some of our more rural areas, we might be looking for—we might sit around the table looking at a broadband fund that would fund 100% of the costs and still look at it and ask, "Does this make economic sense from an operating cost point of view? If you gave us all the money to build this, does this still make financial sense for us?"

I think there are areas across the province where that conversation is happening, and I think our network—we look at it as a whole. We don't really look at, "This house is costing us too much money, so we're not going to build to it." But I think there is that sense that there are areas where, even with 100% capital funding, they are still difficult to service.

Ms. Norah Fountain: But made as an essential service, then the question goes away—because it's an essential service. It's like, "You have to fix that road"—and that's where the public dollars come in. We have to deem it essential.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I think it's a really valuable and important discussion.

When I was the Minister of Education, one of the things that I was really thrilled to announce was a standard for all students in the province to have one megabit per second per student—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter:—and that necessitated the rollout of infrastructure, at least to those schools and those classrooms, which was a starting point.

I very much agree with you on the library hubs, as well, because those are really, really important.

I do want to share my time with the Green Party leader, Mike Schreiner. I believe he has some further questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, MPP Hunter.

I just wanted to go back to the Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition and the costs of green infrastructure versus grey infrastructure. Can you talk about, especially when it comes to flood mitigation, how you can deliver the same results at lower cost?

Ms. Jennifer Court: I think the way that the flood mitigation efforts can be delivered at lower cost—there are a couple of different reasons. Number one, it's local, so stormwater management is treated on-site, rather than channelling it elsewhere. You're dealing with larger overall quantities when you're moving it, whereas if you deal with rainfall where it falls, it's much easier to manage. And then, the types of solutions are also less intensive and less expensive to build.

I'll turn it over to Deb in a moment to talk about the LID side, but when you're looking at things like rain gardens, bioswales and just leveraging and protecting existing wetlands, the costs of those are much lower. You're dealing with planting and soil, leaving things in place and protecting them, rather than digging, laying concrete and dealing with large expanses of land where you need to do intensive infrastructure projects. It's both related to the scale and to the materials.

I want to just highlight again the co-benefits. You deal with pipes and culverts, and there's no aesthetic; there are no co-benefits there—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thirty seconds.

Ms. Jennifer Court:—whereas when you're dealing with natural solutions, there's also recreation and aesthetic and pollution-prevention elements.

Deb will address some of the LID costs.

Ms. Deborah Martin-Downs: Well, not so much the costs—but I think the important part right now with climate change is to recognize that these green-infrastructure components of the stormwater system are well distributed throughout an area. You've seen the very concentrated effects of some of these storms we've had, and if you have—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll move to the government side for their time of questioning now. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, all of you, for your presentations this afternoon.

My first question is to Mr. McGuire. Mr. McGuire, you've shared with us your concerns about your industry and the impact COVID-19 is having on it. We've heard from delegates from many sectors sharing the pain that they've been suffering since we've been forced to shutter a number of industries, but thankfully your industry is

probably the least impacted by it. I'm hoping that you can contradict me when I say this: I recall that a large segment of it was deemed an essential service, and the construction industry was given the green light to go ahead and open much earlier than most sectors, but even within that context, you're saying it's still hurting. Can you share where, exactly, your challenges lie?

1450

Mr. Brian McGuire: We were fortunate and many of our customers were fortunate to be deemed essential in the project work that was picked up. I think the most important thing is to make sure that projects continue, to keep our folks working. That has a spillover effect to the industry. As long as projects are going on and new projects are let, folks who purchase our equipment and use our equipment will continue to purchase it and need servicing. I think the message we want to make sure of is that the projects continue to flow to keep the effects on our industry to a minimum.

I will contradict you a little bit: To say that our industry was not touched would not be the case. Many of our dealers have seen a fall-off in sales and service. The fact is, construction did slow and many projects have not started, as we outlined at the beginning of our comments. We're fortunate because whether the project is green or traditional grey infrastructure, our members work on those projects.

Craig, I'll let you wrap up the answer.

Mr. Craig Drury: There's still an air of uncertainty. If someone wanted to make a commitment to a \$30,000-, \$50,000- or \$1-million machine, there may be work there, but they may be running their older stuff just because they're not comfortable enough to make decisions on new purchases.

Just from COVID-19, we have some disruptions in supply chains. Other factories have had trouble getting parts or whatever to put things together.

I would add—and I'm sure you're hearing this with other sectors—we have the woman issue, where they get affected, as much as any other industry. They have child care issues. Those things creep into our industry, as well. Anything that we can do to keep—the wage subsidy program that the federal government has done has been very helpful to keep all of us employed so that we can keep supporting our families through all this.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Again, you were deemed an essential service—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Donna Skelly:—so you certainly worked throughout the early stages of COVID-19. I've spoken to a number of stakeholders within your industry, and there have been some outbreaks, but for the most part, the workers have remained fairly safe. What do you credit that to? I'm raising it as we move into stage 3, and of course, school opening in September. How has your industry been able to work fairly safely through these past few months?

Mr. Brian McGuire: Part of the answer to that is, by its very nature, construction tends to be a socially distancing field. Many workers, as part of standard safety

practices, are wearing a face mask, and they tend to work with that six-foot distance, generally. And much of the work is done outside. I think all of those factors have contributed to, fortunately—while as you say, there have been some cases, which there are going to be, I think we were made fortunate by those factors in the industry.

I don't know, Craig, if you want to add anything.

Mr. Craig Drury: I'm not sure I have much to add to that. Certainly, we are separated and we are outside, so that helps.

Ms. Donna Skelly: My next question is to Norah Fountain. Let's talk about the need for broadband. We know we need it. We know we have to have the federal government step up. As you've eloquently stated, it's a very, very expensive initiative to roll out to all parts of Ontario, yet it is critical as we move beyond—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Donna Skelly: How has business changed, and how are they now involving including the digital world in the way that they operate?

Ms. Norah Fountain: The problem is that many have tried to pivot over the last three months, and some have done it extremely successfully, but we have others—I'm going to give an anecdote: a clothing store that can only get cell service where her store is, and she's saying, "Norah, you keep pushing me to e-commerce, but how can I even work with a designer when I don't have broadband service to my location?"

We don't even have it, and we don't have it fast enough. We're right here in our office in downtown Bala; we're also trying to automate some of what we do and use customer management service systems, and it just doesn't work for us because it's not fast enough. It's really hard to be able to say how we will manage to change when we haven't even been able to get onto the playing field yet.

Does that answer the question?

Ms. Donna Skelly: It does, and I think it is very evident that we have to work harder—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Sorry to cut you off.

That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for your presentations.

BROTECH PRECISION CNC
FEDERATION OF ONTARIO PUBLIC
LIBRARIES AND
ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
ONTARIO WASTE MANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATION

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next group of presenters: First, we'll start with Brotech Precision CNC. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Jerome Horowitz: My name is Jerome Horowitz. I'm the president and one of the owners at Brotech Precision CNC. I'm just going to share my screen with you. You might already have a copy of this. I just want to

give you a little bit of an overview. Our goal for this presentation is to tell you a bit about us and to tell you about our relationship with Bruce Power and the Retooling and Economic Recovery Council as well as the opportunity to accelerate a very important project and what it means to the economy overall, and what it means to us at Brotech and the Barrie community.

We are a supply chain partner to world-class companies in aerospace, defence, medical, oil and gas, transportation and nuclear. That's a mouthful. We make metal components. What that really means is, we make metal stuff and it's really, really precise, sometimes as small as two ten thousandths of an inch. That is literally what everybody calls splitting hairs. We make a lot of products that impact lives. Our products go into nuclear reactors, planes, defence systems, medical devices, food safety—there's some equipment that helps keep our food safe; in fact, if that market in China had the equipment of one of our customers, then the pandemic wouldn't exist—and medical isotopes.

Here are some examples of some of our products. They range from small to large, there are all kinds of different materials, and all of these are made using CNC machines. We can give you an idea of what they look like in this picture up here. There are all of the smaller machines that we have, and here, on the right, is a shot of one of the larger machines that we have.

There are some of the industries which I've named, and some of the customers that we have dealt with indirectly, and now, some of them directly—some big-name companies. Some of the ones in the news lately: Nordion, which is supporting food safety and medical sterilization; Bruce Power; and Héroux-Devtek, which is in the defence business and landing gear business.

We are a small business located in Barrie and, more recently, in Owen Sound. We've got 70 employees now. That's grown quite a bit in the last two and a half years, since starting our relationship with Bruce Power. The type of customers we have are all local customers, but their markets are global. In my opinion, this is the kind of company that our governments should be supporting—export companies, small businesses focused on companies that are in technology fields and that are employing young people to get into promising careers.

1500

We use high-tech machines. We're using robotics. We're using CAD/CAM design software. So these are good jobs, long-term opportunities—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jerome Horowitz: —and this is where we can actually compete internationally in high intellectual property industries.

The type of jobs we have in our company are CNC machinists, programmers, assemblers and quality control inspectors. We do have close associations with Georgian College, the two school boards in the area—as well as supporting the community in organizing summits for growing the manufacturing economy.

In the last 10 years, we've transformed our company, moving from tier 2 to tier 4, up through tier 1. The major

event that happened with us in the last two years is the opportunity to work with Bruce Power. We did sign a 10-year agreement with them. That has helped us transform our company. We've also recently signed a long-term agreement with Nordion, and we're in the process of working with other companies to sign long-term agreements which bring us sustainability in our business and predictability in our workforce, among many other benefits.

We have been interested in the aerospace field. We have had significant opportunities and business in aerospace, but as everybody understands, aerospace has slowed down and we don't expect it to be active for another couple of years. Prior to this year, that would have been a critical part of our business plan, working with Bruce Power—because the Bruce Power agreement is for six reactors over a 10-year period. In between doing parts for a reactor, in between one reactor and the next, our plan was to work on other industries. With aerospace being slow, there's a big risk.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Jerome Horowitz: The Retooling and Economic Recovery Council was founded by Bruce Power. I believe you heard from them this morning. We're a partner. Their goal is to help some of their suppliers accelerate the project. As we said, the project would compact into five years instead of 10 years. This would have the effect of supporting 3,700 jobs, direct and indirect, in the economy and supporting \$1.2 billion to \$2 billion in economic activity. For Brotech, that means 25 jobs are protected over the next five years. Without that, we may be going up and down in our workforce, and that would stifle the opportunity—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. Your time has come up now. We'll have to move to our next presenter.

First, we'll go to the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Andrea Cecchetto: I'll start the presentation on behalf of myself and my colleague. My name is Andrea Cecchetto, and I'm the president of the Ontario Library Association. We're presenting today with Stephen Abram of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. I wanted to start by thanking you all for the opportunity to speak here today.

What we're going to do, on behalf of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, is present some recommendations and justifications, in tandem with the OLA, in support of Ontario's library industry sector. We are looking at several different issues, including some of the issues that are facing schools and public libraries.

We are excited by the strong passion of Ontarians for the support they've received from the Ontario public libraries for over 150 years, but especially during this pandemic. As I'm sure you're aware, with so much of our life transitioning to virtual platforms, libraries have had a significant role to play in that process.

It is a fact that libraries are vastly different and have a greater economic and social impact than 20 years ago, and

that's really exciting for all of us in the industry. Today, what I'd like to provide to the committee is an understanding of the modern Ontario public library community roles, which include digital community engagement as well as programs, and to provide recommendations on how infrastructure funding can help better support our communities' success in the province. Libraries are not seeking a new normal; we're inventing our next normal, and we have a centuries-long tradition of very successfully adapting to change.

Over a dozen recent independent research reports have shown that public libraries are an excellent government investment in infrastructure. The return on investment of \$1 in local public libraries averages \$5 in economic return on investment and close to \$25 in average social return on investment. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that Ontarians in all communities depend on digital access for work, to learn, to connect to community, to government services, to find or train for a job and for access to health information. Sadly, it is true from our independent research data that public libraries are a critical place where over 25% of Ontarians access computing, WiFi, the Internet and equipment, including software and peripherals. This percentage is even higher in small towns, rural, First Nations, northern and remote communities.

According to the CIRA, the number of Canadians working from home has grown sevenfold. Nearly half of all households report having two or more people working at home due to COVID-19. Some 38% of respondents said that their home Internet speed is slower than before physical distancing began. Over half of Canadians are spending more time using video or teleconference technology, as we are doing today, to connect with others.

In our written submission, we are going to be sharing dozens of stories from Ontario residents about the impact of public libraries on their quality of life and their success. What we're asking for today, however, is that the Ontario government be a greater part of our journey. The Ontario government has no other stigma-free public service institution that enjoys our level of trust, has talented and professional staff, maintains longer open hours than nearly any government service and has deep technology, education and information literacy skills, high customer service standards and is available to over 98% of Ontario communities. Because of our reach and our impact in the communities, it's a unique opportunity to exploit the sector for the benefit of Ontarians.

Throughout the year, public libraries have evolved to meet the needs of communities in many different ways. Public libraries are an essential access point for technology and broadband Internet, especially for hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who cannot afford in-home Internet access.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Ms. Andrea Cecchetto: This feels very aligned with the province's anti-poverty strategies, and this is especially vital for many rural and northern communities across Ontario, where at-home connectivity is limited. Without

public libraries to depend on, rural or northern communities would have limited options for accessing technology and broadband Internet.

Folks answering questions continue to be our core business, and this is more important than ever during the pandemic. Local libraries have also been providing WiFi connectivity for residents, an essential municipal service, via hot spot lending; in parking lots through bookmobiles; lending laptops and PCs and peripherals to municipal and essential staff who continue to work from home; providing access to e-resources, such as e-books and streaming platforms, reference materials and more; pivoting to move tons of programming online; helping families and individuals with e-learning and e-government access; and delivering early-literacy storytimes online, tech training, book clubs and so much more. We've also been doing work such as organizing care calls to vulnerable community members, including seniors.

What we need now is a digital investment to serve Ontario communities' needs. The COVID-19 emergency has magnified the weaknesses and opportunities in exploiting the role of public libraries in every Ontario community. The next normal is not a return to normal; we know that. It's clear that the next normal will see increased work from home, learn from home, safe and trusted spaces being needed to maintain local community vitality.

Ontario public libraries' digital services are growing exponentially and are highly in demand. However, in many libraries, access to these services is limited by the availability of broadband access and enough hardware, peripherals and software. Many branches do not have high-speed broadband access and have outdated Internet infrastructure that does not meet today's residents' needs or demand for digital access across the communities.

1510

So there's much that we—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Andrea Cecchetto: There is much that we can do to prove the value of our technology access in public libraries. As I've stated before, there's still a majority of residents in Ontario—53%, in fact, of public library users report that the public libraries were their only access point to technology, and 71% got their Internet through library WiFi. The work that we do in areas such as social engagement and civic engagement are increasingly done through e-services, so it's more important than ever that we're able to provide equitable access to all Ontarians.

What we're hoping is that with an investment in this infrastructure, we'd be able to leverage Ontario's broadband action plan to ensure that modern broadband connectivity is available in more public library branches in communities all across Ontario. Even with our physical doors closed, the demand for public library broadband increased during the lockdown period—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. That concludes your time.

Our next presenter is the Ontario Waste Management Association. Please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Mr. Mike Chopowick: I'm Mike Chopowick, CEO of the Ontario Waste Management Association. We appreciate you all holding this committee hearing today on what is really a beautiful day in July.

I'm not going to spend too much time talking about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our sector. Just a couple of points on that: Waste management remained an essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic. Waste collection and processing staff remained on the job, in some cases, managing residential waste volumes that increased 20% to 25% higher than a year earlier. Of course, activity in the commercial sector, notably in the diversion of hazardous waste, automotive waste and electronic waste, declined significantly—in some cases, ceasing activity completely for a period. About 17% of commercial waste customers suspended their service altogether.

What I wanted to use my time now for was to talk to you about the waste sector's role in the economy and what the government can do to strengthen the waste sector's ability to support Ontario's economic recovery. I'll tell you that our municipal and private sector waste service providers at OWMA often feel overlooked when it comes to forming economic policy in Ontario. We hope that after today, this changes.

Look, I get it. My members, companies and municipal waste service providers—we pick up garbage; we empty waste bins; we sort, recycle, process and dispose of all the things that you don't want and all the items that Ontarians discard on their curb. Wherever you are right now, whether you're at home or in your office or at Queen's Park, there's probably a waste or recycling can nearby, and that's where you're going to put your empty coffee cups, used tissues, crumpled paper, food wrappings and anything else. And then, like most Ontarians, you'll forget about it, because it will disappear, collected and managed by the waste sector.

But here's the interesting thing: Everything that goes into that waste bin or trash can is part of a 14-million-tonne waste management system, with over \$3.9 billion in annual and public expenditures and over 15,000 direct, full-time employees. To give you an idea of how much 14 million tonnes of garbage is, one tonne of garbage is about 100 of those big black or green garbage bags. If you can picture what 100 big black garbage bags look like—now try and imagine what 14 million tonnes is. That would fill up—well, imagine the Rogers Centre stadium in downtown Toronto filled completely with garbage. That sounds like a lot of garbage, I'm sure, and waste. Now, multiply that times 19: That's 14 million tonnes, and that's what Ontarians, residents and businesses in Ontario, generate every year.

Where does it all come from? Sixty per cent of our waste generation is from business, and 40% is from residential sources. And what happens to it? About 7% of that goes into blue boxes, 8% into green bin and organic waste programs, and 9% of that goes into regulated waste diversion programs for things like hazardous waste, electronic waste and materials such as used tires.

The other thing you have to understand is that waste is very mobile. Few, if any, municipalities in Ontario self-sufficiently manage all the waste they generate within their own borders. Waste is most often trucked across municipal and regional borders using our trusty fleet of about 3,700 collection and haulage vehicles. One third of Ontario's waste—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes left.

Mr. Mike Chopowick: Thank you—even finds its way across the US border, with 3.5 million tonnes a year going to landfills in Michigan, New York and Ohio.

Some solutions to these problems: First, the government needs to get aggressive with producer responsibility to improve recycling. Producer responsibility regulations need higher collection and diversion targets, more materials included in programs like the blue box, and stricter obligations on producers, retailers and brand owners to recover the materials they send us. This isn't just good for waste reduction; it's also good for the economy. The Conference Board of Canada issued a report that found that the right recycling policies could create 13,000 new jobs in Ontario and \$1.5 billion in GDP.

The second thing that our sector really needs to help Ontario's economic recovery is more reduction in the red tape facing the waste sector. Believe me, our members appreciate hearing that Ontario is open for business, but everywhere we turn we face unfair and outdated regulatory barriers to investing in new waste diversion, recycling and disposal infrastructure. If the government wants the private sector to improve recycling, food waste composting and safe disposal, then they have to knock down the regulatory barriers that are costing us time and money.

We look forward to working with the government to ensure that future changes to environmental approvals and the assessment process make it easier and not more difficult to build waste management infrastructure such as recycling facilities, landfills and composting facilities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now. This round of questions will start with the government side. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I'll direct my first question to the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries.

Andrea, thank you so much for your presentation. I very much appreciate it, and it's topical, of course, as well, as the government announces our plans today for school reopenings. I have absolutely no doubt that libraries will continue to play an essential role in supporting the education of our students. I'm particularly thinking of our high school students, some of whom may be moving to this adapted model where some days they may be learning from home or remotely. I see a lot of possibilities there for libraries to continue to step up and find a place for students who may not be able to access education remotely from home—to be able to head to their local library.

I have a couple of questions. The first is just a data question that I was curious about. You were talking a lot about the number of people who access virtual services

through the libraries. Has the federation collected any data on how much there has been an increase in demand for virtual services over the COVID-19 period? I see Stephen is also raising his hand.

Ms. Andrea Cecchetto: Thank you for your question. I'll refer to Stephen Abram to take it from here.

Mr. Stephen Abram: I'm Stephen Abram. I'm the executive director of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries.

Yes, we have collected the data on demand since 1998. The government collects the data; the federation has normalized it and put it into a longitudinal analysis. We know in the last five years we've had three billion visits to Ontario public libraries. Our programs have grown at 83%, and our digital presence has grown between 1,500% and 2,000%, depending on whether you're talking social media, website visits or whatever.

What we've seen in the last 150 days is another 300% growth. We've seen e-books going through the roof, growing exponentially, and we've seen e-learning being a key challenge. Right now, our libraries are open at the stage 2 standard to allow people in to use the computers under a socially distanced way. However, when the schools open—our normal process is that the kids come into the schools after school. When you go to a hybrid school day, our services and computers and broadband are going to be slammed as they do more intense work, and if they go to the quadmester program like in Toronto, or even if they go to day 1/day 2, we're going to see a really high impact on our broadband. The lack of broadband and the poor broadband in small towns, rural areas, the north and on First Nations is non-equitable to allow our kids to succeed in this new environment—and I think we need to be prepared for second and third waves.

1520

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate that, Stephen.

Minister Scott presented to the committee this morning and talked about our focus on expanding broadband and working with the federal government to make that happen. I think that's so critical when we talk about the library sector, because there are so many virtual services that you offer, whether it's accessing e-books or—I can say that I personally went through a good selection of the Ottawa Public Library's audio books virtually over the course of COVID-19. So I agree; I think that broadband piece is critical.

I'm wondering if either of you might be able to comment on some of the ideas you have—because I imagine there are some floating around—on ways in which libraries can become better virtual hubs for communities, any ideas on new, innovative services. I think, for example, about the number of people who are having trouble doing Zoom calls. Are there ideas bouncing around on how libraries can do that innovative virtual hub model better?

Mr. Stephen Abram: The urban libraries are well on their way and are already there. Our concern is that that is broadband-intensive use, and we've noticed from the CIRA survey that people are reporting that their speed of

access—if you’ve done a Zoom call with your friends on one of these, you know that it clicks out every once in a while because everybody’s doing it from home, and our broadband is set up to work from the business community side of things. That’s what the for-profit broadband providers do. The non-profitable parts of broadband are where those libraries don’t have the infrastructure—which we have to know is the economic infrastructure, the way railways were when they built Canada from east to west.

Building the broadband infrastructure allows anyone to participate successfully in our economy and use the library to develop their skills. So we have Lynda.com, which could be moved province-wide instead of in the centres. Most of our work has been around creating digital public libraries to increase the HR capacity of our residents to adapt to this new economy.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Stephen Abram: It’s irrespective of anyone’s income, and that’s how we help people lift themselves up.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Chair, how much time remaining?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Ten seconds.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Well, thank you so much for your presentation. It’s very much appreciated.

Next round, I think my colleague Andrea has some questions for some of our other groups. Thanks, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I apologize. Actually, the independent members were supposed to go in this first round, but mistakenly, I put the government first, so now I’ll go to the independent members. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I’ve got lots of questions, but I want to start with our waste management and talk a little bit more about producer responsibility and how having stronger policies will help us build a more circular economy that’s more sustainable for the environment.

Mr. Mike Chopowick: Absolutely. There are a couple of very important benefits here with producer responsibility. Number one is putting obligations on companies that manufacture and sell all of the items and products and materials that we end up throwing out or putting into our recycling system. Producer responsibility provides an incentive for them to manufacture and package items and products in a way that actually creates less waste, but also creates products and materials that are easier to recycle. That’s important, because then we can have a made-in-Ontario economy, where we’re purchasing and consuming products and materials, but then also collecting and then reusing and remanufacturing these materials into new products that we provide.

A big example is in the electronic waste sector. Your iPhone and your laptop computer—those things contain very, very valuable components and materials. I don’t know if you use an iPhone or a Samsung, but if you pick it up, there’s gold, silver, platinum—very valuable material in there that, if we recover those, we can actually use that in Ontario to create a new manufacturing base. So there’s not just a tremendous environmental benefit, but an economic benefit as well.

The principle is very clear. If Best Buy can sell a pack of batteries in Scarborough, it can recover those used batteries in Scarborough. That’s the core of producer responsibility—ensuring that producer companies recover, collect and pay for the cost of recycling those materials.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It creates jobs, as well, which are really needed at this time.

I do want to quickly jump to the libraries. I believe that Ontario has one of the best library systems anywhere, and in the time of COVID-19, it’s great to hear the message of reinvention. Libraries are community hubs and really wonderful places. I’m going to say thank you for what you’re doing, and keep innovating. I do hope that the government will see libraries as an essential investment, both for infrastructure investment in what we’re doing as part of the recovery, but also in terms of the social impacts that you have.

I’m going to yield my time to my colleague Stephen Blais, who has some questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Blais, three minutes.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I’d like to continue on the library theme for a moment. I think they are community hubs. In Ottawa, we’re building a brand new central library that’s going to be an amazing community hub, in partnership with the federal government. Unfortunately, the province has chosen not to participate in that funding.

I was speaking to the chair of the library board earlier this afternoon about some of the issues the library is facing coming back from COVID-19, and something that he mentioned to me—and I was wondering if this is being experienced by others across the province—is that it’s taking about one third more staff to get the library branches open again. As a result, about a third of our libraries won’t be able to open because of the pressure it’s putting on the system. I’m wondering if that’s something that’s being experienced in other parts of the province.

Mr. Stephen Abram: Yes, that is a common experience. We generally have self-service. People come in and pick up their holds, do it online. We’re a very, very efficient system. However, curbside pickup and staying at curbside pickup for some libraries, where they’re too small or in a hot zone, such as Windsor, does take a lot more staff.

We also think that our normal staffing models in the fall, when school goes back and we have children in during the day overlapping our seniors and our businessmen—we know that 40% of our users on our terminals are running a business there. We support entrepreneurs, and it’s one of the less-known things, because everybody thinks we’re all about kids’ reading. We know that if they come for kids’ reading, they have a letter-grade difference by grade 8, and we’ve got the independent research showing that. But it’s quite a different thing to say that you’re an essential support to local businesses. How do you start a big business? You start a small business and let it grow.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Stephen Abram: If we want to get to the next normal and have a recovery in Ontario, we have to make

sure that the support systems are there for innovation and research.

Mr. Stephen Blais: What would be the most important action the provincial government could take to support libraries coming back properly in the fall?

Mr. Stephen Abram: Broadband infrastructure to get us all up to equitable access for northern, rural and small towns, and putting content in the pipes so that everybody has access to the quality materials that Toronto, Ottawa and Hamilton have. It's just not equitable right now.

1530

Mr. Stephen Blais: I don't think there's any time left, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Yes, it's almost over.

We'll go to the opposition side now. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you, everyone, for your presentation. I'm sharing time today with a number of my colleagues, so I'll do my best to be short and sweet.

I'd just like to comment to the library folks, thank you for all that you do. The Minister of Education was in Durham region today making announcements not too far from where I used to teach. My students in the south end of Oshawa used to gather for the WiFi after-hours outside of the Jess Hann Branch, which became a safety concern—and that was pre-COVID-19. It's a community without Internet. That's consistent, as we hear, all across the way. Anyway, I'm recognizing the important role that you will be playing as we are heading into uncertain futures.

My colleagues are going to come at you with questions, so I'm going to address my question to Mike from the Ontario Waste Management Association.

Thank you for the work you're doing. I think everyone recognizes that it is absolutely essential that we have our waste considered and looked after properly. In Durham region, we have a lot of different pieces that fit into that puzzle.

You mentioned barriers to investing in new infrastructure, and you talked about red tape. What would be a specific example that this government could actually sink their teeth into?

Mr. Mike Chopowick: We do have an acute shortage in landfill and waste disposal capacity in Ontario. Right across the province, we have in total maybe about 123 million tonnes or less of landfill capacity. I point that out because, absolutely, we have to do more for recycling and waste diversion, but the reality is that 70% of our waste does go to landfill. We need a regulatory environment and changes to the Environmental Assessment Act that foster private sector investment in new landfill capacity.

The second thing I'll say is with the financial assurance guideline. Waste sector companies have to usually provide—it's like an insurance policy against future risk, and the amounts of money that waste sector providers are charged in financial assurance are—let's just say, they're not aligned properly with the very, very low level of risk involved with things like transfer stations and recycling facilities. We have submitted recommendations to the chair of the Ontario jobs and economic recovery task force

on specific ways of reforming that guideline, and I'd be pleased to also share those with members of this committee at a later date—just realigning the amount of money that's charged in financial assurance with the low level of risk associated with waste diversion and recycling and disposal activities.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Chair, how are we for time?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Okay. I will say that waste is definitely a problem that the government shouldn't be wasting any time—pardon the expression—in solving, as we're sending things to the States, and can we or can't we, and for how much longer. It's obviously a very involved system.

Thank you for the work that you do.

I'll hand it over to MPP West.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP West.

Mr. Jamie West: I won't have time to ask Mike a question, but I do want to remind everybody of something that he said briefly, which is that waste management is something that you don't notice until it doesn't go well—and the importance of supporting that. We all know when it doesn't go well.

My question is for Mr. Horowitz from Brotech. In your presentation, Jerome, you talked about CNC machines and robotics. I looked at the photos in the presentation. I think you were being too humble about the equipment that you have. It's very high-end stuff. I come out of the mining industry, and we've changed over the last couple of decades, where we basically blew things up and smashed them with moils, and now it's more precise—lots more precision, lots more CNC machines, lots more robotics. Our first robotics company that we had, when we went out to look for someone who could help us, was Lewis Australia. I can't imagine a farther place to go to outside of Ontario.

You talked about Brotech getting contracts around the world and the competitive nature of this work, and that if, as government, we don't support industries like Brotech, we won't be able to keep up. They'll forge connections in other areas, and we'll be left behind.

I just want you to talk about the quality of the jobs and the importance of us remaining competitive in this sector in Ontario so that we remain world leaders.

Mr. Jerome Horowitz: Interestingly, most of our customers are in Ontario, and even though they may be in Ontario, they are part of a global supply chain. Whether we sell to Héroux-Devtek, who are selling in the international defence community or in the international aerospace community, or whether we sell to Nordion, who are selling internationally, or to a small company called Amico, who supply hospitals in the US market, Ontario is a great manufacturing hub with a lot of high-tech.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Jerome Horowitz: We are a part of that and a growing part of the high-tech manufacturing sector. We're seeing amazing opportunities. We're young in robotics, but we've got a lot of experience with CNC. When we marry the two together, along with some industry-leading,

industry 4.0 kind of technology, we can compete with China; we can compete with anybody in the high-precision field, and we're very proud of that. We think that there are a lot of great job opportunities.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll start the second round now, and I'll start with the government side. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I have a question for Brotech, and then I'll pass it off to one of my colleagues, MPP Roberts.

Obviously, you've got some very highly specialized industries you're involved in. Do you have any thoughts on the SMR space, the small modular reactor space? This is a potentially growing space of clean, efficient energy that could help propel Ontario's economy forward.

Mr. Jerome Horowitz: I'm definitely not an expert on that technology. However, we're a part of the OCNI, the Organization of Canadian Nuclear Industries, which is following the sector strongly. Many of the members of OCNI are very interested in pursuing it. There's a lot of energy being placed around it—pardon the pun—and we're in agreement with you that SMRs can be a great opportunity as we explore different energy options. The industry is adapting. The huge Candu-supportive sector is ready to pivot and go after the infrastructure required for SMRs.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'm going to pass it over to MPP Roberts.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Just continuing on our questions with Mr. Horowitz: Thank you so much for your presentation.

I know my colleague MPP Khanjin wanted to ask you a question. She, of course, is the MPP for Barrie–Innisfil, but unfortunately, she is having some technical difficulties. She wanted me to ask you if you could elaborate a little bit on the impact of your business on the local Barrie economy and how important it is that we get the recovery right to help support the local economy in Barrie.

Mr. Jerome Horowitz: Thank you very much for the question.

Over the last 10 years in my involvement in the company, we've grown from 12 employees to 70, and about 70% of the employees of the company have in some way been touched by Georgian College. What this speaks to is the fact that we're a young company; we have recruited a lot of people through the apprenticeship program out of high school, as well as out of Georgian College.

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The jobs that we provide are great long-term opportunities. People have started with us from a wage, when they're just out of high school, of \$14 an hour and grown and been with us to where they're currently making \$25 an hour, plus getting lots of overtime and have benefits. They're able to support their families.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Jerome Horowitz: I see a lot of young people who take on mortgages, get married, have children, create a life for themselves, have hobbies. This means that we're a

source of good employment. It's not the restaurant sector or the retail sector. We're talking about great long-term opportunities. There are a lot of smart people who are making the products that we make, and together we're building something.

There are a lot of people who are proud of what they do. I can't speak enough about the team that we have and how we've become a great part of the Barrie manufacturing community—and it really is a community. We happen to be, in Barrie, one of the automation capitals of the country, even though we're not right in the auto hub. There's a lot of technology here, and Georgian College is investing in the automation sector, as well. We are participating in projects with Georgian College.

All I can say is that we're really high-tech-focused, growth-oriented, serving the advanced manufacturing sector. We're definitely one of the kinds of companies that our governments should be getting behind so that we can grow our way out of the recession.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I think I'm running out of time, but I know that MPP Khanjin would want me to thank you for the work you're doing, and she looks forward to working with you to attract that new youth talent to the region.

Mr. Chair, what's our time?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Well, we can move quickly to waste management.

Mike, you talked a little bit about the responsibility of trying to see what we could do with producers to divert more industrial waste into recycling. Do you have any ideas of some of the examples of industrial waste that you guys are seeing come through the waste stream that could be diverted into recycling? Are there any materials, for example, that companies should be recycling or selling etc.?

Mr. Mike Chopowick: I think it's really timely to talk about household hazardous waste products—so you think of things like containers from 5W30 oil and antifreeze and paint cans. I think there's a timely opportunity to increase diversion targets for those products and create a new regulation that mandates those responsibilities for the companies and producers that sell those products into the market. Those are potentially dangerous materials if they're not disposed of properly.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the opposition side. MPP Andrew. I just want to make sure, MPP Andrew—did I do your attendance check this morning?

Ms. Jill Andrew: The Clerk confirmed that you did.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Please go ahead.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you, everyone, for your presentation.

My question will be directed to our friends at the Ontario Library Association. I first want to say thank you very much for all of your hard work and for being responsible, quite frankly, for helping many of us graduate from high school, all the way to university—having access

to the Internet, having access to your excellent librarians, many of whom are doubling as social workers, employment coaches, you name it. I really appreciate that work. And it was a real honour to speak to the CUPE Ontario library workers last March in Niagara Falls.

I understand that the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries—that your budget has been frozen for 22 years. So we're talking about frozen provincial funding to the libraries for 22 years. I really wanted to get a sense of what it would mean to have that thaw out and be no longer frozen and for you to see that investment into the libraries, especially as we're talking about COVID-19 recovery.

Mr. Stephen Abram: In 1996, the provincial contribution to public libraries was cut by 50%, and it has remained at that value—no inflation increases, nothing—for over 22 years. This means that the provincial contribution to the public library sector in the era of e-government and that sort of thing is down to 4%, from what used to be 10%. This is not sustainable. Our municipalities have allowed us and have increased our budgets—but the pressure on municipal budgets and their cash flows right now is stupendous, and we're very worried that some of that will, of necessity, fall onto the library budgets.

We're the best instrument for the government to deliver social, economic and capacity work in the province, so anything that can be done to increase our role in building capacity in Ontario is needed badly.

Ms. Jill Andrew: You actually took my second question. I was going to ask you or Andrea to speak to the importance of the province properly funding our municipalities, because here, as I sit in Toronto, we know that if it doesn't happen, we could lose 60 or more of our local libraries. To do that would be a huge blow to our social fabric, because you all are very much social medicine. We can talk forever on equity issues and issues of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing through this particular political time, but even the last government, as well—these are all issues that were still chronic and have to be addressed as we're going into COVID-19 recovery.

Any last words? Is there a figure? Would there be a budgetary amount that you could say would really support our libraries in COVID-19 recovery?

Mr. Stephen Abram: We estimate that doubling the \$30-million commitment from the province to \$60 million restores us to the inflation adjustments. It doesn't increase the—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Stephen Abram: —commitment, but it fixes the inflation adjustment.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I'm going to share my time now with my colleague Judith, who has questions, as well.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to Stephen and Andrea for your presentation and your passion as librarians.

I would like to really emphasize, which you did, the issue of equity, especially when we see the new education

plan, and especially in northern Ontario. The northern MPs are very adamant—and MPPs in our areas across the north really recognize that the library is often the only place where people can access computer services and broadband services and Internet services, and that those libraries are so important to communities. In Thunder Bay, they've been a hub for reconciliation. I congratulate the work of the libraries in Thunder Bay as well, because they are so important.

Do you have any more comments about the equity issue?

Mr. Stephen Abram: I think that part of the equity issue is—I encouraged the president of ORION, the not-for-profit broadband utility that allows us to have sustainable, not-overpriced broadband, to visit First Nations reserves all around, and we've been working with Thunder Bay Public Library to connect Thunder Bay Public Library to the four reserves around Thunder Bay. It's to deal with some of the social issues that are there. We don't want to see these teen native kids having to go to the edge of the reserve and hold their phones up in the air in order to do their homework. It's just unconscionable that—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.
1550

Mr. Stephen Abram: ORION has finished the cable underneath Yonge Street, all the way through. It's the last mile that needs to be funded now, to the libraries on those reserves and the local libraries, to make that happen.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? MPP West.

Mr. Jamie West: My question, as well, is for the librarians, Andrea and Stephen. I want to thank you for advocating for libraries. I've had many meetings with librarians, such as those represented by CUPE 4705 in Sudbury.

I just want to talk about the importance of digital access. You talked about it a little bit. Previous questions really focused on the idea of the hub access, but many of my constituents have no Internet access. They didn't have mobile devices or tablets. Their form of Internet is going into a physical library, and when COVID-19 locked everything down, they lost that. They lost the opportunity to connect, apply for CERB online, all those resources. If you want to just expand on the importance of that as a hub—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. Your time has come up.

We'll move to the independent members now. MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thanks to all three presenters for the very valuable information you've provided today.

I'm going to direct my first question to the libraries. I just want to echo a lot of the calls around the conversation around just what a vital role you play in terms of equity and access. But I want to take a slightly different perspective on it, related to economic recovery. I'm increasingly speaking with more and more entrepreneurs and business start-ups that are utilizing the resources at libraries to provide them with the information and sometimes even the

broadband access they need to get their business going, getting it off the ground.

Do you want to talk a little bit about the role that libraries are playing in helping entrepreneurs—doing research, accessing funding etc.—in terms of a business start-up, and especially what role libraries could play in the COVID-19 economic recovery in that regard?

Mr. Stephen Abram: I can do stories, and we'll put them in the written report, but I think I've got something better: I've got data.

We surveyed 50 libraries all across the province, of every size, and including the First Nations. In terms of entrepreneurship: 20% of all of our users were using the digital services for their businesses, and 85% of them employed between one and 10 people, so these are the small businesses. On job search skills: 62% reported that they were using the library to find their jobs. As you know, the majority of jobs are found through LinkedIn and Twitter now and through the Web, not through classified advertising. Thirty-four per cent of the users were developing employable skills, and First Nations were the most likely to, with the majority of them saying they were developing employable skills. Then there were the educational aspects.

We think that data shows that as long as we can get the architecture platform right, we can make everyone in Ontario equitably access the bounty that is our province. We are an awesome place to live, but not for everyone equally.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I really appreciate—the data's great. I look forward to your stories in your written submission.

I know, as I think MPP Andrew pointed out, your budgets have been frozen, after taking a significant cut. Do you feel like that is hampering your ability to fully serve entrepreneurs in helping them create jobs—and then I would also just ask around job-seekers, given what an important role libraries play in that regard?

Mr. Stephen Abram: The research shows that we're the most trusted institution in Ontario after emergency room doctors and firemen. We depend on that trust, but libraries cannot live on love alone. We know they love us, but we can't deliver the best stuff possible, we cannot make our programs and everything align with government policy—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Stephen Abram: —and move everything up. There is a lot of opportunity to expand in places that are very strategic and aligned with the government's goals. This government has good goals around ending poverty and employment and supporting small business. We can help with that, and we can do it in every community in Ontario.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate that.

I just want to switch to Mike. Lafarge was at committee earlier today, talking about what a job creator and a money saver the circular economy can be. You touched on it a bit in your presentation as well, particularly around producer responsibility.

What can the government do to leverage the benefits in terms of job creation and financial savings in the circular economy?

Mr. Mike Chopowick: I think, primarily, making sure, first of all, that collection and diversion targets are aggressively high. There's always a risk when—and this really refers to the setting out in regulations the percentage of materials that ought to be collected and recycled for different categories. Sometimes they're set at 65% or 75%, depending on the material or the product. Those need to be aggressive.

Secondly, minimizing and limiting the number of materials that are exempted from producer responsibility regulations: I think we'd be very strong advocates of a very extensive list of materials that are included in things like the upcoming blue box producer responsibility regulation, household hazardous waste and electronic waste regulation. We need to make sure these regulations capture as many materials and products as possible.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I think MPP Hunter has a quick question in our remaining time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Hunter. One minute.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Back to libraries: I'm just wondering, Stephen, if you would support the notion of library infrastructure being eligible for the federal and provincial infrastructure recovery that is coming out.

Mr. Stephen Abram: Absolutely. It has been one of our challenges that infrastructure money has often been limited to municipal asks and to roads, sewers and—important infrastructure, but we think that social infrastructure is more sustainable as an employment base, and it's more sustainable unto the vitality of life in our province and ensuring that we lift everyone up. This is an opportunity to do that fairly, without thinking about creed or colour or anything—that we ensure that everyone gets to participate equitably.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I know that in my community, libraries are actually important for immigrants and newcomers as well—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off. That concludes our time.

Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentations.

RURAL ONTARIO
MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION
XPLORNET COMMUNICATIONS INC.
ONTARIO SOCIETY
OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next group of presenters: First, I would like to call upon the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Allan Thompson: Allan Thompson, the chair of ROMA and also the mayor of the town of Caledon.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): You may start.

Mr. Allan Thompson: Good afternoon. My name is Allan Thompson. I'm the chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, better known as ROMA. I'm also the mayor of Caledon. I'm joined today by Brian Rosborough, the executive director of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. Thank you, Mr. Chair and the members of the committee, for the opportunity of being here.

I want to begin by acknowledging the important announcement made on Monday by the Premier that municipalities in Ontario will receive up to \$4 billion in financial assistance for COVID-19-related costs and revenue losses, including transit costs. This committee has heard from both rural and urban municipalities about the importance of emergency financial assistance in every part of Ontario. Monday's announcement reflects the important investment in municipalities of all sizes. Municipalities of all sizes will play a key role in Ontario's economic recovery.

I want to commend the government of Canada and the government of Ontario for this important investment. I also want to thank all the parties of this Legislature for supporting the investment in municipal financial sustainability and for the investment in rural communities in particular. I think we all can agree that municipalities will lead the economic recovery.

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Assistance with our COVID-19-related costs and losses is an important part of this picture. The other part of this picture is the investment in municipal infrastructure, and the economic stimulus and job creation it provides. The economic costs of COVID-19 have been enormous. Unemployment in Ontario in May was a staggering 13.6%. That's the highest it's been in nearly 40 years. There have been improvements. Jobs are being restored as the province reopens. But frankly, the economy is going to need additional stimulus to recover.

Investment in municipal infrastructure means improved prosperity. It increases productivity and job creation, raising the GDP, incomes and tax revenues over the long term. We saw that after 2008, where the investment in public infrastructure played a key role in the recovery. The investment in infrastructure in rural communities can ensure the recovery is broad-based and benefits local economies in every part of Ontario.

Municipal service improvements make communities better places to live, work and invest, and make Ontario more competitive. Infrastructure improvements make it more efficient to transport and trade goods and services. In the short term, those investments also create jobs directly in local private sector firms providing consulting, construction, employment and skill development.

In AMO's recent report to this committee, there was an extensive discussion about the important role of infrastructure investment. I will highlight some of those areas that are especially important to rural Ontario:

Investments in transportation infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, keep people and goods moving

effectively, productively and safely. They support tourism, resource industries and manufacturing.

Investments in water and waste water services protect people and the environment. They also help with climate change and support industrial, commercial and agricultural investment.

Investment in broadband connects the rural communities to opportunity, supports innovation and also creates the human talent resource that resides in every part of this province. Investment in broadband is also essential to supporting access to participation in education, employment, health care, public safety, information, data and services that form the modern economy.

Investment in public infrastructure should also recognize the important array of human services that municipalities deliver in every part of Ontario. Rural Ontario faces the same challenges as the larger communities when it comes to human services that people rely on. It's easy to think of challenges such as homelessness, affordable housing, access to child care and long-term care as urban issues.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Allan Thompson: This is not the case. They're municipal issues. They affect rural communities in every part of Ontario.

The additional new capital investments in human services play a major role, increasing economic potential and the participation of the economy that includes child care, affordable housing, shelters and supportive housing services for the homeless, long-term care and recreation.

Investment related to infrastructure improves services to people who help underwrite great participation in rural workforces, strengthens communities and promotes resiliency. Improvements to such current programs expedite investment. For example, immediate improvements to programs such as the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, ICIP, could also be made, improving projects faster and front-loading costs to municipal governments. But municipalities will need more flexibility, less reliance on municipal share programs that help respond to local priorities and local economies, including those of rural municipalities.

In conclusion, municipal governments have worked hard to support residents, businesses and communities through this emergency and will lead the recovery. Also, the right of laying a foundation for municipalities today means it can help our communities make up lost ground and help Ontario lead Canada's economy to recovery.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Our next presenter is Xplornet Communications Inc. Please state your name for the record, and you can get right into your presentation.

Mr. Steve Van Groningen: Steve Van Groningen, manager of corporate affairs for Xplornet Communications Inc. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for your invitation to join today. I'm joining you in place of C.J. Prudham, who was unable to make the meeting this afternoon.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to update you on how Xplornet has kept rural Ontarians connected to what matters throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Xplornet is Canada's largest rural-focused Internet service provider, connecting nearly one million Canadians, over 350,000 of whom are in rural Ontario. Conquering our country's vast geography by bringing fast, affordable Internet to rural Canada is more than just our business; it's our purpose. We proudly serve those Canadians who choose to live outside of the cities.

The needs of rural Canadians who depend on us have been top of mind for Xplornet since the COVID-19 outbreak began earlier this year. This pandemic has accelerated trends in Internet usage that have been building for some time. Businesses sent their employees home, moving Internet traffic from urban offices to home offices that are often outside of the city. Schools adopted e-learning faster than anyone expected to keep children in class. And to maintain a sense of community in a socially distant world, rural families have been keeping in touch on Zoom and FaceTime. In short, life has moved online, and it has done so as much in rural Ontario as in our biggest cities.

At the peak of the pandemic, we observed an increase in traffic on our network of 30% to 40% throughout the day. Demand is still elevated from what we have observed in past summers. Our network operation team works 24/7 to balance this demand, to ensure that our customers receive the best Internet experience.

This pandemic has demonstrated the critical importance of expanding access to rural broadband as fast as we can. The remote work, video meeting and online learning tools we all have become so familiar with recently are enabled by a fast, affordable Internet connection. Providing these connections is what Xplornet does.

In the past five years, Xplornet has invested over \$1.5 billion in our facilities and in our network across Canada, expanding coverage while increasing both speed and data for our customers. Last year, we announced plans for a further investment of \$500 million to bring 5G services to rural Canadians. Xplornet is expanding access to our 50-megabit-per-second services, which are already available in northern Ontario communities like Hearst, Smooth Rock Falls, Temagami and Espanola. We have also launched unlimited data packages that are available to all of our customers. This unprecedented move has made unlimited data available to rural Internet users in every province and territory, to a fantastic response.

To enable these advancements, we are using the same technology being deployed in Canada's cities—fibre, microcells and fixed wireless technology—to ensure that rural Canadians enjoy access to the same speeds and data. Through innovation and private investment, Xplornet's network will offer services that exceed current national targets for broadband connectivity by 2030, well ahead of schedule. In the next three years, Xplornet intends to offer 100-megabit-per-second download speeds and unlimited data packages to 1.5 million underserved rural Canadian homes, all funded by private capital investment.

Our investments are already adding capacity to the network this summer, despite the challenges presented by

the pandemic. In particular, our network buildout includes several substantial broadband infrastructure projects in eastern Ontario. In the Quinte region, Xplornet's new hybrid fibre/wireless network is designed to connect over 40,000 homes and offers speeds up to 100 megabits per second to rural residents. Similar projects are slated for the counties of Northumberland, Prescott and Russell, and Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. These projects are driven primarily by Xplornet's private investment, though we appreciate the support received from the federal connectivity program.

With careful consideration, there is a role for government to play in supporting rural broadband projects. Targeted public investment can complement private investment, helping networks build out further and faster. We are pleased to see the launch of the Improving Connectivity for Ontario broadband program this summer, and we look forward to working with the government of Ontario to achieve our common objectives.

However, if we are to make improving rural broadband access a policy priority—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Steve Van Groningen:—some of the most important contributions governments can make are not monetary, but rather simple changes to the regulatory process. Xplornet is eager to forge a strong working relationship with utilities and municipalities to enable the rapid deployment of our networks. Access to infrastructure such as hydro poles is essential to a rural network buildout, but delays caused by utility pole access policies and fees are creating a barrier to broadband expansion. Similarly, some municipalities do not follow federal standards or typical timelines in responding to applicants seeking to build broadband infrastructure within their boundaries.

Governments at every level have declared rural broadband a priority, and many are generously providing funding, like the government of Ontario, but all have to coordinate closely to ensure that the effects of their support are not lost through costs and delays imposed by the policies of municipalities on provincially regulated utilities. Faster, simplified approval processes and timely access to infrastructure such as hydro poles are essential to seeing the construction of new broadband infrastructure projects completed on time.

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Thank you again, Mr. Chair, for offering us the opportunity to speak today. The pandemic has demonstrated the critical importance of Internet access for rural Canadians, and we at Xplornet are eager to work with governments at all levels to keep rural Canadians connected to what matters.

I'm happy to answer any of your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Our next presenter is the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. Please state your name for the record, and you have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective, knowledge and experience of

Ontario's engineers. My name is Sandro Perruzza, and I am the CEO of OSPE, the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. We are the voice of the entire engineering community. This community represents over 300,000 professional engineers, engineering graduates, internationally trained engineers and engineering students who work in virtually every single sector of Ontario's economy, including infrastructure.

The simple truth is that engineers create wealth for the province through the development and commercialization of new technologies and by designing innovative and sustainable solutions that benefit all Ontarians. Engineers also ensure safety and stability by designing the resilient infrastructure, reliable energy grids and clean water systems that Ontarians rely on daily.

During this pandemic, engineers have led the redesign of manufacturing processes to create much-needed personal protective equipment and ventilators. They are in the med tech industry, working diligently to bioengineer new medications and develop vaccines for COVID-19. OSPE ourselves have donated masks and sanitizer to front-line workers to show our support for the community.

The engineering community has been severely impacted by the pandemic, as thousands of engineering jobs were lost that were directly linked to the infrastructure, manufacturing, technology, research and innovation sectors. This talent will be needed to rebuild the engine that drives not only Ontario but the rest of the country. As such, the province must support the engineering community if it wishes to capitalize on their economic recovery efforts. It is imperative that new funding allocations provide sustainable benefit for diverse future generations by ensuring a targeted focus on sustainable infrastructure, talent development and retention, and fostering innovation.

Here are our recommendations:

One: Invest in shovel-worthy projects by developing a comprehensive project investment pipeline document. This project investment pipeline document, which is informed by current requirements from municipal asset management plans, will prioritize projects that are both shovel-ready and shovel-worthy. These projects will provide a positive return on investment as well as deliver localized social and community benefits.

Two: Support small and medium-sized engineering firms by tackling increased liability insurance costs. Engineers support the provincial and federal governments' approach to focus immediately on these shovel-worthy projects, as we mentioned above. However, to achieve this, engineering firms must be able to compete in the market. Currently, insurance providers consider Ontario a high-risk jurisdiction. These changes not only have resulted in significant increases in costs of professional liability insurance, but also in commercial, general liability and property insurance. More dramatically, it has resulted in some engineering firms and engineers being denied access to insurance altogether. Without access to this coverage, small and medium-sized engineering companies cannot operate in our province, and some have shut down. This decreases the amount of infrastructure

that can be designed and therefore built, stunting economic growth. Let me repeat: Without the market capacity to design the infrastructure we so sorely need and will depend on for our economic recovery, there will be no infrastructure to build. This liability insurance issue is a sleeper issue that no one is talking about and that will have the biggest impact on economic recovery in this sector.

Three: Accelerate the electrification of the transportation system, including electrical vehicle adoption. Ontario should work towards a safe, green, innovative transportation system that is able to support a clean environment while boosting trade, economic growth and public safety. Investing in EVs provides the opportunity of achieving short-term results by allowing clean sectors to grow sustainably and substantially over a relatively quick timeline.

Four: Modernize Ontario's building code. The national building code and the national energy code for buildings—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza:—contain new guidelines for energy efficiency in homes, small buildings and industrial, commercial and institutional properties. Ontario should adopt these sections of the national building code and the national energy code for buildings into the Ontario building code and define clear steps and milestones for achieving a net-zero building code by 2030. By doing so, not only will Ontario decrease its carbon footprint, but it will also create new jobs, build new energy-efficient buildings, allow for retrofit markets and reduce energy costs for homeowners and tenants.

Five: Invest in talent development, knowledge training and support for Ontario's engineers. Ontario must invest in engineering talent across the province. One of the primary barriers to innovation and growth is access to a talent pool that possesses the skills necessary to adapt to the future economy. Prior to COVID-19, some of Ontario's most strategic sectors, such as infrastructure and transportation, were already facing a talent gap in their engineering markets. Engineering projects are being awarded to international firms because Ontario does not have the right talent to do the work. The success of the economy depends on the ability to match talent with job vacancies and ensure that this talent can adapt to market demands. This problem is now magnified by increasing demand for more technologically equipped engineers due to market capacity challenges caused by the current crisis. Every jurisdiction is investing in infrastructure because they know it works. There is a fierce international fight for talent, and we are losing it. We are simply not developing the engineers we need for the future. The engineering regulator, Professional Engineers Ontario, has yet to develop and implement a continuous professional development program for licensed engineers. This is not only an economic imperative; it's a public safety issue, as identified in the public inquiries of the Algo Centre Mall collapse in Elliot Lake and the Radiohead stage collapse at Downsview Park.

Finally, number six: Invest in Ontario's mining infrastructure. Mining is the backbone of Ontario's economy. This industry produces about—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza:—\$10 billion in revenue for the province per year, and employs over 75,000 Ontarians. Mining is also the largest private sector employer of Indigenous people. The Ring of Fire region in northern Ontario is an immense and untapped economic opportunity. The development of this region will also provide enormous long-term benefits to northern communities through increased economic activity and job creation. To realize the full economic potential of the Ring of Fire, the government must prioritize key investments in core infrastructure, as well as ways to address the training needs of the labour market and local Indigenous communities.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We'll start with the questions now. This round of questions will start with the opposition side. MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'd like to thank all the presenters for their information. It's always enlightening, and you hear common threads.

I'd like to address my question today to Mayor Thompson from ROMA. I'm hearing from other municipalities that they haven't heard a lot of detail about the planned money flow to the municipalities, and a lot of them are facing financial crunches. I'm wondering if ROMA has had some insight on when to expect that money and what kind of a framework will be around that. Will it be allocated to certain things?

Mr. Allan Thompson: Thank you for the question. I might defer to Brian Rosborough, because he has been working closely with the government on how to implement that. Part of it is to transit. That's going out right away—they said this week. Also, for households across Ontario—is how part of it is being divvied up. The rest of it will be coming through to municipalities in a modernization fund. But with the shutdown and being able to deliver on services and tax relief—at the end of the day, we still have bills to pay. For some of us, we do have reserves, but we're sure rifling through those, and that's not sustainable, so we need this quickly.

Brian, if you could fill in a little more, because you've been working on this—and we've been waiting to hear from him, as well.

Mr. Brian Rosborough: Thank you, Mayor Thompson. And thank you for the question; it's a very good one.

Certainly, the need for financial assistance is very urgent, and municipalities across the country have said so. We are pleased in Ontario that we now understand the quantum of funding available. But your question was around the mechanism by which it's distributed and allocated. We have not heard that yet. In the announcement, there was discussion about further consultation with both AMO and the city of Toronto around that. We have not undertaken in that consultation yet.

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Originally, we were supporting the FCM proposal that would see that money, the financial assistance for

municipal operations, to be distributed on a per household or per capita basis so that it would be equitably distributed and could have an impact in every part of Ontario. Certainly, the need is in every municipality across the country. And then we would anticipate that the transit funding is likely going to be distributed based on transit ridership to transit-operating communities. But those details have yet to be heard.

I will say that municipalities—our members—are taking a lot of comfort in understanding that there is an adequate amount of money that is coming our way, which helps a lot in terms of planning for the next period. Municipalities have also been taking a lot of steps to reduce costs as they have awaited that funding, and are anxious to get things as back to normal as possible to restore services that people rely on and to see what position we're in as we plan for our 2021 budgets.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you very much. I'm going to hand off the questions to my colleagues.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes. MPP West.

Mr. Jamie West: I have a question for Mr. Perruzza from the society of P.Engs. First, I want to say, it's interesting; just before your deputation, your magazine arrived, so it's very good to see. I love the expression you had about not just shovel-ready but shovel-worthy projects. We've had lots of conversations about the importance of infrastructure, and shovel-worthy, I think, is something we really need to wrap our heads around, as well as shovel-ready, so we can get them out the door.

You talked about the talent pool—lots of discussions for us about tradespeople, but as well with the professional engineers. Engineering is hard work. It's difficult to qualify and finish, and we need to support that. We need to build that STEM end of our technology.

And then when you talked about investing in Ontario's mining infrastructure—I am the MPP for Sudbury. I worked in mining; you're speaking my language. These are good-paying jobs. These are rewarding jobs. These are careers that people are very proud of and enjoy a lot.

If you could just expand on—you talked about the Ring of Fire, mining in the north, many Indigenous communities, and how supporting professional engineering really helps develop these rewarding careers in Indigenous communities.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: A couple of years ago, we held a forum in North Bay on this issue, looking at how to develop the Ring of Fire. Although it was hosted by OSPE, we invited First Nations people, we invited local municipalities, we invited engineers, technicians, technologists—everyone involved—because this is a community issue; it's not an engineering issue.

Our proposal that we had put forward was that this would create capacity within the Indigenous communities to actually improve their own communities. There have been lots of stories of building water treatment facilities in Indigenous communities and in a few years they go to pot.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: What we look at is that the community actually develop engineers, technicians and

technologists within the Indigenous communities. Let's train them to be the engineers, so that when they get jobs on these mining sites they're not jobs as cooks, cleaners or security, but they are jobs in engineering and technology; so that as they are building the sites, they're also ensuring the environmental sustainability of those sites, they're ensuring that the water is clean—and then they are the mentors who train other youth in STEM jobs. So it's really sustainable that way.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank all the presenters.

My question is to the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers. I want to thank you for the work that you do. I do a lot of local work with the schools in my community—we do things like Mathletes and bridge-building competitions. I think it's super important that your members and affiliates are giving back in that way.

I'm very struck by your opening remarks and the opportunities available in Ontario—particularly, to compete, and that we need to build up the talent pool in order to compete—so I'd like you to comment on that.

I also would like to know what your association or affiliates are doing in terms of building the capacity for more women in engineering in Ontario.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: First, around the talent pool: I sit on the—it used to be called the Council of Ontario Deans of Engineering; now it's just Engineering Deans of Ontario. The Engineering Deans of Ontario and Engineering Deans of Canada have actually been lobbying the regulators around the country to modernize the engineering curriculum for decades. The reality is that our engineering schools are excellent. They rank very well internationally because the quality of education is great. Unfortunately, the content is outdated. They're learning the wrong computer language. They're using equipment that is outdated, that is not used in the field anymore. They're not learning modern construction techniques that are happening in Europe and other parts of the world. So the first thing that needs to happen is that the regulators need to step out of the way and let the educators educate. That's one of the things that we need to do.

Secondly, the regulator needs to put in mandatory professional development. You'd be shocked to find out that as a professional engineer, you have no requirement to do annual training to upgrade yourself. All you have to do is pay your \$250 licensing fees, and now you can practise in the province. You don't have to declare what discipline you're practising, and you don't have to declare whether you're practising or not, either. So mandatory CPD is a big issue. We're the only province that doesn't have it, and it's going to have large implications in that foreign countries aren't going to allow Canadian engineers into their workplaces to do work, because we're going to be kicked out of the Washington court because of it.

With respect to women in engineering, we have been promoting women and other under-represented groups in engineering for decades. We hold an annual conference. For the last few years, we've done it in Ottawa, with over

800 people at it. The federal government has been a tremendous partner in this. Hopefully, as we continue to host this conference, we'll get more support from the provincial governments as well. Our approach is not talking to women; it's actually talking to employers, the people who hire the women. Our approach is that—again, it's not just women, but we're looking at intersectionality, so other under-represented groups, including Indigenous youth. It's a big part for us, to get more engineering and STEM jobs for Indigenous youth, and careers in that. We have people come in and share their struggles—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza:—and then we have people come in and talk about some of the strategies they can put in place to remove the barriers to allow that to happen. It has been very successful. We did a three-year project. Now we have an app that employers can use and learn these micro lessons on how to remove the barriers within their workplaces to not only encourage women and other under-represented groups to get into the profession and into their workplaces, but actually promote them and make them leaders—because a big part of it, as well, is that these under-represented groups need to see people like them in leadership positions. Our thing is: See it, be it.

Those are just a few of the things that we do.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I will yield the rest of the time to MPP Schreiner.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you, MPP Hunter. I'm hoping I can ask a question of Mayor Thompson in round 2, but I want to pick up on your excellent answer from the engineers and build on it.

You talked about the importance of electrifying our transportation system. I'm just wondering how vital that is to maintaining Ontario's competitiveness and lead in automotive manufacturing.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: It's massive. The automotive industry is moving to electric and automated vehicles. If we don't have a strong network, then automotive manufacturers and car companies are going to look at Ontario and say, "This isn't a jurisdiction we can do business in. This is not a jurisdiction that supports the move that the market is moving into."

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Beyond that, it's actually also linked to energy prices in Ontario. We have a lot of capacity in this province, and a lot of the energy is curtailed at night.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: So we're actually losing money by running these plants at night, and unfortunately, you can't shut off a nuclear plant. They're running 24 hours. By promoting electric vehicle use in this province and electric charging stations, people will—just think of it: Their cars aren't being used at night, so they can take that surplus energy and use it by charging their vehicles at night. Basically, the vehicles are battery storage cells. Think of if we have tens of thousands of those. That's a way to store our energy on a massive scale.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: And you would say that would lead to cost reductions in our electricity system, as well.

Mr. Sandro Perruzza: Yes. Right now, a lot of electricity charges are used to subsidize energy that we're not using, energy that we're curtailing. We did a report in 2017. It showed that Ontario at that time was curtailing half a billion dollars of energy per year—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. We'll move to the government side now. MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you to all the presenters today.

I'm just going to start with a question for Allan. Allan, we just wrapped up consultations with a number of our municipalities. I've got a number of small rural municipalities in my own riding. I'm wondering if you could speak to us about the importance of the OCIF funding in COVID-19 recovery and what rural municipalities can do with that funding going forward.

Mr. Allan Thompson: Yes, I think it's really key.

I will tell you, the modernization fund that was started by this term of the Legislature has also been a big help. It was unknown to us how important this was going to be for us to be able to operate the way we are today. If we didn't have that modernization fund to adapt—and it's about adapting in time. It's key, as well.

To get back to the OCIF funding, it's a major fund for the rural municipalities. You look at how large urban gets a lot of the gas tax, especially provincially, especially for transit and many of the other infrastructure. The rural municipalities really need that OCIF funding because it's really, really important; it's our key infrastructure that we have to help bundle with ourselves to get projects done. We just can't afford to do it all on the tax base, and to me, this is something that is extremely important.

A lot of this used to come out from the farm tax rebate, and that's gone now, so we only have this left. So it is vital and it's key and it's extremely important. I appreciate this government and the previous government for extending—at one point, they were going to roll it up and there was going to be nothing between the Ontario municipal grant fund as well as the OCIF. Keeping those funds going has been really good.

If it wasn't for the funding that we did get from the last two budgets for our local municipalities, I'm not so sure where we'd be today, coming through this COVID-19 crisis. They are key to getting us out of this crisis, as well.

Mr. David Piccini: Yes. Allan, you just touched on the modernization funding. It's funny; I just got off the phone with our mayor of Cramahe, a smaller township in my riding, talking about roads. I know the importance of the asset-management plan. Often, we look at COVID-19 in isolation and fail to talk about steps the government took before. From what I heard from her, and maybe you can elaborate, the importance of asset management, which you're now mandated to do—but also the modernization funding, from a tech perspective, in upgrading their systems has, she said, helped them better prepare for COVID-19 and COVID-19 recovery. Can you elaborate a bit further?

Mr. Allan Thompson: Absolutely. I'm not so sure if we didn't have that fund whether we'd be able to adapt to

serve, to allow our staff to work at home, to work in safe environments. A lot of municipal halls are extremely old, especially in smaller municipalities, and it's not a great work environment, especially for COVID-19 crises. So where do you work from there? Again, this is where I'm saying the broadband infrastructure—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Allan Thompson: —is really key.

Also, it's collaboration; it's working, like you heard, with Xplornet, with the Rogers and the Bells and the Telus. But it's also Hydro One, which has the huge infrastructure—but the one that's the head of telecom, there's nobody home right at the moment; there hasn't been for a while. We really need some leadership on that part to help us get—I'm not pointing fingers or blaming anybody over oversubscribed towers or everything. I'm at complete frustration trying to work from home here today, and I'm praying—I've got my phone as backup, hoping that if I go off I'm going to be okay. I think this is something that we're all experiencing. It's not finger-pointing; it's just something as to how we get there. I have Rogers, and I have Xplornet. They're both terrible. Sorry, Steve; don't take it personally. Everything is oversubscribed and it's just tanking, and—

Mr. David Piccini: If I can just jump in there, because we are all in this together—this is both to you and for Steve, as we move on. Steve, it's good to see you.

I think broadband—and I'm hearing this time and time again. I know we've made an investment, obviously, with ICON. I think, given it's a federal lead, as the minister said this morning, it's important that they front-end that investment.

Steve, can you talk about the ICON program and elaborate on some projects in eastern Ontario—and Allan, then, on the importance of the feds coming to the table on this and front-ending that \$1.7 billion?

Mr. Steve Van Groningen: Of course. Thank you for the question.

In terms of the ICON program, we welcome the Ontario government's interest in providing supports for rural broadband. We look at these public investment programs as a complement to the private investments that Xplornet and others undertake to roll out rural broadband improvements across Ontario. We recognize it as something that is going to help us go further and faster.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Steve Van Groningen: That being said, I want to reiterate the point that governments need to ensure that all of their policies around this important aim are aligned. It's excellent to see the provincial government creating broadband support programs, but at the same time we want to make sure that the effects of that are not lost by delays that can be caused by issues in terms of getting access to the passive infrastructure like poles in order to actually build and implement the projects.

What we're looking for is for all parties here to come to a good working relationship to make sure that we're all working towards the same aim, which is to improve rural broadband for residents of Ontario.

Mr. David Piccini: Allan or Brian?

Mr. Allan Thompson: I'm going to just tie in where Steve is going. What I'm going to say is, talking about lifting emergency measures—there should be no emergency measures lifted when it comes to broadband. Everybody needs to work together. We need Hydro One at the table. We need everybody working together to serve our community—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll move to the independent members now. MPP Blais.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you, everyone, for your presentations this afternoon.

A question for the delegation from ROMA: As you know, Ottawa is actually one of the largest rural municipalities in the province. The vast majority of our territory is rural. But often when governments—and it's really all the governments—create programs for rural Ontario, the rural communities in Ottawa are left out because they're considered part of the big metropolis. Communities like Carp in Kanata-Carleton or Greely in the riding of Carleton often don't get the same kinds of advantages as the smaller communities that are just on the other side of a creek or a highway. I'm wondering how that could be addressed as we go forward and are thinking about recovering from COVID-19 and government programs that might be coming about.

Mr. Allan Thompson: One thing I will say is that the federal government, through Minister Monsef, has got a really good understanding on that, right at the moment—on getting into the rural, underserved areas such as what you've said. I'm part of Caledon, part of Peel region, some 1.5 million people in Brampton and Mississauga—and I'm 56% of the land mass; we're 75,000 people over 741 square kilometres. I'm a big area. But very similar to what you have is, we're the rural component that no one really understands or thinks is important. The kids down there have Internet coming home from school. All their books are on Chromebooks. Caledon has got that huge deficit, especially on the education side. So, yes, it is, and it's like that in every rural municipality, and in northern Ontario as well.

Two areas that we do have are EORN and SWIFT, which have brought all the rural municipalities together and are working in a big fund, like two big pools. We need to have the same kind of organization, especially for northern Ontario, even in the northwest and the northeast.

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We definitely need that kind of collaboration, because we're limited on resources, on project managers. Get back to where the engineering is. It is so specialized, and we have the small telcos that can help us, but we have to have everybody at the table working together. Forget this independence, this "it's all about me." There's no *[inaudible]* in shareholders; we've all got to work together.

Mr. Stephen Blais: I appreciate that, for sure. How do we get government, though, to recognize that whether it's in Peel or whether it's in Ottawa, there are rural communities within some of these larger regions—or in Ottawa's

case, a larger city—so that those small communities don't miss out on high-speed Internet extension? Carlsbad Springs is 25 minutes to Parliament Hill and you can't get high-speed Internet. Parliament Hill is 25 minutes away. But Ottawa would never qualify for a grant under some kind of special small community program or something like this. How do we work on that together so that those communities aren't overlooked?

Mr. Allan Thompson: That's a very good question, Stephen.

I'll tell you where a lot of assessment has been done: It was on this grid sampling that they were putting together, and it's kind of like a paradox that they're all joining these squares together in mapping. That was just dismal on servicing.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Allan Thompson: When you don't have Bell and Rogers serving what you need to get to, it's a problem. They have listened to us. They have pulled back on that. SWIFT and EORN have been really championing for those municipalities, just as you said, saying, "Look, we know where the underserved areas are. The local municipalities have really good data, and we really need our MPs and MPPs to champion for those communities as well." We're all in this together; we've all got to work together. This is a pandemic, but this is one of the things that we're definitely going to need to help recover out of this, to have that infrastructure support.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Thank you for your answers.

I think MPP Schreiner has some questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Schreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I just want to build on that, Mayor Thompson. I think you've been a big champion for rural broadband. I know we're all thankful that both the provincial government and the federal government have put money on the table. But I'm curious: Do you think it's enough money, and do you think it's flowing fast enough to serve rural communities when it comes to broadband?

Mr. Allan Thompson: No. It's just the tip of the iceberg. But I think it's the confidence—I think SWIFT and EORN have shown through their initiatives what they can do in collaborating. Use the resources that are there; quit reinventing the wheel. I'm going to tell you, there's going to be a broadband crisis come this fall when the kids are back to school and people who still can't get back to work because they can't get child care or anything else are still trying to work from home. I think that we're going to have a really interesting fall if we don't somehow figure out how to implement and put emergency measures on this. I'm really serious about this. We definitely have to move the money quickly. We need—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Allan Thompson: —prequalification on a lot of these projects going forward, as well.

Yes, we're going to need more investment, and I think that the information and the talent are there. The organizations are there across Canada—FCM has really done a really good job on that—but I think it's just how we can collaborate, how to work to get our communities connected in the quickest ways we know how.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Thank you for being loud and clear on that. I think a lot of us are going to be pushing both our provincial and our federal colleagues to deliver on this, because I think you're right: We are going to face a crisis in the fall if we don't flow money now and don't flow sufficient amounts of it.

Mr. Allan Thompson: It doesn't matter what party colour or stripe you are; we're all in the same boat here. We've got to figure out how to work together on this.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I hear you. Thank you for that, Mayor Thompson.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We are out of time.

We'll go back to the government members. MPP Khanjin.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I have questions for Allan and for Steve, on the topic of broadband.

You had mentioned throughout your comments and in questioning the fact that we really do have to get to the 21st century and the fact that broadband is important and it's different throughout regions. I know York region, which is close to me—I'm in Simcoe county—there are pockets of York region that don't have proper broadband, and people think that's strange because it's York region. So I hear you loud and clear on that one.

I wanted to ask you both: SWIFT has been proven to be a really swift program—but just to get your comments again on ICON and the role of the private sector and the role it has to play with better connectivity for the future.

Mr. Steve Van Groningen: Thank you for the question.

In terms of private sector activity, rural broadband is a market—it's a business. What Xplornet's experience over the past 15 years has shown is that there is a private sector business case for rural broadband investment. Xplornet has invested a billion and a half dollars in expanding our broadband network in the past 10 to 15 years. We have plans to go quite a bit further.

We welcome the interest that comes from the Ontario government and the government of Canada—even from municipal governments that are interested in supporting broadband projects. But in terms of building up the infrastructure, it happens in response to customer demand, and right now we see an enormous amount of demand from rural residents in Ontario who want a good broadband connection in order to be able to work from home, to access e-learning tools, to be able to use telehealth. It's extremely important for us to be able to respond to that demand.

I do want to come back to this point, though, because I think it is very important: The broadband funding programs are important and necessary, but what is also very critical for the companies, like Xplornet, that are actually building and operating infrastructure is ensuring that our regulatory framework around things like access to the hydro poles is aligned with our goals of expanding rural broadband. It sets up a pretty strong barrier to the advancement and deployment of these new and evolving networks if providers like us have difficulty getting access to hydro poles to actually put in fibre cable. We have difficulty with municipal processes around permitting and approvals in

order to put up the tower infrastructure we need to provide the service.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Allan, did you want to add any comment before I pass it over to my colleague David Piccini?

Mr. Allan Thompson: He was talking about hydro poles, but also there's CN and CP that are sitting there on dark fibre. And Rogers and Bell haven't been playing nice in the sandbox, but they're only using about 8% of what they need for their services, and it's a good way to backhaul—it's like the 401—for a lot of us to tap into and we could run from a lot of towers.

This is why I'm saying we have to have everybody at the table working together to figure out how to get us connected from point A to point B across Ontario. It's really important.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Allan Thompson: I'm paying \$615 a month for nothing.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: It's frustrating. I hear you, for sure.

I am going to pass it over to my colleague MPP Piccini, because I think he had some questions to follow up with.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP Piccini.

Mr. David Piccini: Thanks very much, MPP Khanjin.

Allan, I hear you too. You should have been at my broadband round table in Codrington. I've never seen anything like it. There were more people there than during the debate in the election. It was just something. So I echo the sentiment: We need better broadband.

You spoke about dark fibre, and I'm just curious, as the riding boundaries straddle three different counties—with respect to dark fibre, what role do you think each county can play? Who can bring together that consultative process on mapping out that dark fibre? Who could take the lead there?

Mr. Allan Thompson: I've talked to Minister Monsef about that particular issue. Again, everybody seems to work in their silos, so we've got to get past the silos. Give us a representative out of transportation. But we also need the provincial guys here.

I think the one thing with the railways and hydro—boundaries should not matter from one county to the next. Right now, we have to all work together to get everybody connected. I think that's key.

SWIFT—there are 20 municipalities. Caledon is not part of the western wardens' caucus—but we've joined, along with Niagara region, Waterloo region. Muskoka has now joined in, along with Pelee Island. We've got 20 First Nations involved, as well.

It is definitely a need. We all have to work together, and we've got to pass through each other's communities—so it's how we bring everybody along the way. It's like building the railroad 200 years ago and, 100 years ago, putting hydro through—and here we are with broadband this century.

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Mr. David Piccini: You mentioned that you spoke with Minister Monsef.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. David Piccini: Has she committed any of that \$1.7 billion provincially into Ontario, and specifically eastern Ontario?

Mr. Allan Thompson: I can't answer that part. When I spoke with her, that was back in—oh, crumbs, before COVID-19. It was February, I guess, when I had a good conversation with her about that. She was moving across the province at that point in time, when she was doing her tour, in early winter.

There are other opportunities we need to tap into here. Who knew we would be here now talking about what we're talking about? We knew it was an issue then; now it's a crisis.

To me, there's no finger pointing. Let's innovate, create and figure out how to make this work. I think there are huge opportunities for getting a really good system here going out of this crisis. We can have a huge opportunity to serve all the residents of Ontario.

Mr. David Piccini: Yes, I think all fingers need to be pointing to "connect"—but that means all fingers, not just some. So I definitely appreciate that.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): I will move to the opposition side now for their second round. MPP French.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Welcome, everyone, and thank you. It's nice to see all of you.

I will address my first question to the folks from ROMA. I appreciate, Mayor Thompson, what you were saying about getting familiar with the big area. You and I have talked about the fact that many moons ago I went to elementary school in Bolton and then Palgrave, but one of the pieces that maybe you don't have is that my mother worked in the child care centre in Palgrave, at Pumpkin Patch nursery school.

Actually, that leads me to where I want to go with you. When you're talking about the human services and what people are relying on—you mentioned child care, long-term care and the housing pieces—we know municipalities are stepping up far beyond what anyone could have imagined. Where is that limit, where the province really has to pony up the cash and invest?

Mr. Allan Thompson: That is bang on. You're dead on on that equation.

One thing we have to realize is that municipalities are a creature of the province but we're the closest to the people. If you want to get things done quickly, we can deliver and turn it out on a dime—even if you look at how the gas tax is distributed through AMO and how fast that goes out. Yes, we're the closest to the people. We really have a good pulse on our communities.

I think this is where we need to work together. It isn't about ownership or whatever; it's about serving the same taxpayer that all four levels of government do serve: the two levels of municipal—in some areas, it's single—but the provincial and federal. This is something that's extremely important, especially with the outdated seniors' homes. We've really seen that with the COVID-19 crisis, as well.

We need child care more than ever. We're even seeing that with schools, that classrooms have to be smaller.

We've got a problem here and we've got the summer to figure this out, and it's now August. So we've got less than a month to go or we're going to have a real problem here. We don't have adequate facilities in place yet.

Municipally, can we find solutions? We can, but we just need the flow of funds to flow to make it work. Who does what and who can deliver the quickest? That's what we really need to do—how can we serve our community the quickest way we know how?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I take your point that you don't have the facilities. That's certainly something we hear from rural, from northern, and from communities generally. Also, we're hearing that there hasn't been the planning that we would need to see. So I hope that you have some success in partnership with the province to help guide them in the planning steps, whether it becomes child care, education and those pieces.

I'm going to shift to Xplornet. Inspired by my time in Palgrave, when maybe we had a Commodore 64—it was before the time of the Internet. Some of the things that we've been hearing, Steve, the challenges we heard earlier from the Muskoka folks about the problems with referring to the last mile—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: —that idea that, yes, everyone needs service. What is your take on how we ensure that the folks at the end of the road don't just get mapped as having service, but that they actually have service; that every family, every small business, every student will be able to get service? What needs to happen? Is that you? Is that the province? Where's the private versus public? How do we get everyone that broadband service?

Mr. Steve Van Groningen: There are a couple of different factors that are involved in improving broadband services and making sure that they're available to everyone. The main one is private investment. Companies like Xplornet will go out and invest substantial amounts of capital in building out these networks.

Another piece comes from the public investment that can come from the government of Ontario, from the government of Canada. That can help and enhance and push a little further down the road to make sure that we get every last household. It comes from items like access to the pole infrastructure that we need in order to be able to build these networks out to service people. It comes from getting access to the wireless spectrum, which I recognize is a federal policy issue, but it is very significant in enhancing and expanding rural broadband.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I know my colleague had a question. MPP West.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): MPP West.

Mr. Jamie West: I appreciate the opportunity.

My question, as well, is to Steve from Xplornet.

I want to emphasize the importance of rural Internet. Allan Thompson has been doing it as well, and people were talking about it.

The week before, when I was doing these deputations, I was at my in-laws' home. They're on Xplornet. In one day, I used up 50% of their data, and it was not high-speed.

I'm not saying this as a complaint; it's just the reality of people.

This crisis that we're in, where families are looking at online learning, online schooling—they can't compete with a riding like Sudbury, where we have broadband everywhere. Rural businesses can't compete. Consistently, before COVID-19, farmers were saying that you might not think of farms as a place where they need high-speed Internet, but they need high-speed Internet to compete with the world.

What's the number one thing, the thing that seems the easiest for you, that we could do as a province to get broadband everywhere?

Mr. Steve Van Groningen: At a provincial level, improve access to infrastructure like hydro poles. This is the barrier that we're running into the most in the province of Ontario, in terms of actually being able to build out our networks towards the customers who want the access that we would like to be able to provide. There is quite a lot of—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. I apologize to cut you off.

That concludes our time. Thank you to all three presenters for your time and for your presentations.

KENORA DISTRICT SERVICES BOARD
BLACK CREEK
COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Moving along to our next group of presenters: First, I would like to call upon Kenora District Services Board. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Henry Wall: Good afternoon. My name is Henry Wall, and I'm the CAO for the Kenora District Services Board. I really want to thank you for the opportunity this evening to be able to come before you and give a presentation.

It's interesting; as we work with our municipalities and we look at 2022, I can tell you that we have a number of municipalities in the district of Kenora that will be spending, this year, up to 18% of their operating budget on policing services.

In 2018, as an example, we did a full study in terms of why it is that we have such high policing costs. What we found through that analysis is that Ontario has actually spent \$5.5 million housing homeless people in the Kenora Jail. In fact, about one in five individuals who are homeless in our district at any given time are incarcerated at that point in time, most of the time because they don't have a home and with respect to mental health and addictions.

Also, in 2018 and 2019—what's interesting about those two years is that it was the first time that as a district services board, we were spending more money on emergency medical services than we were on housing infrastructure investments, on housing supports, on homelessness prevention and on emergency shelters, combined, for

the year. That certainly, I think, is something to be quite concerned with.

So then the question is, what does that have to do with infrastructure?

1700

There is another component that is, I think, quite interesting and that should be disturbing to all of us: When we look at our EMS data, as an example, the demographic most likely to end up in the back of an ambulance—this was last year and the year before that and the year before that—were actually 31- to 40-year-olds, followed by 21- to 30-year-olds. In other words, those who should be the healthiest of our population are now the most likely to end up in the back of an ambulance.

So when we look at it from an infrastructure standpoint, when we have municipalities spending close to 18% of their operating budget just on policing, it brings to question capacity.

I started my municipal or public services career back in 2007, just as the financial crisis was hitting. What I saw at that point in time across northern Ontario was that small rural municipalities had a really difficult time even taking advantage of stimulus funding into infrastructure because of how much of their operating budget was actually spent on reactionary—lights and sirens.

I think something, too, looking at post-COVID-19, is, how do we ensure that our small rural communities actually have a fighting chance when it comes to kick-starting their local economy?

There's also an issue—that when our labour force is sick, when predominantly it should be the healthiest portion of our labour force, that does create a challenge.

Part of what I would like for us to think about is using housing as a means to kick-start our local economies and actually invest in Ontario. For the last 30 or so years, Ontario, Canada and our municipalities have jointly paid into a grown equity within the community housing sector, or what was known as social housing—very often known by end of operating agreements. There is a tremendous amount of equity built up in that housing sector currently, and if we look at it from an economic growth standpoint—I think we have a real opportunity to look at that and ask how we can leverage that equity in order to develop new, affordable housing so that we can give families homes. It will give employers an opportunity to support entry-level jobs. So it's not so much about the wage; it's actually for families to have access to affordable housing.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Henry Wall: As an example, if there is to be stimulus funding into infrastructure—let's say it's a million dollars. Through that kind of approach, if it's just simply investing into, say, a road or a waterline or a sewer line, a million dollars will get you a million dollars' worth of infrastructure. But if we start leveraging existing assets that do generate revenue, that million dollars can be converted into \$3 million, into \$4 million, by using the private sector funding, as an example.

We've done a couple of projects over the last couple of years where that's exactly what we've done. We're

leveraging existing housing assets that have been paid off over the years and then using that to work with the private sector to finance and build community housing infrastructure. In turn, what we're finding is that, particularly around supportive housing—we have a project in Sioux Lookout, as an example, where 20 units that were constructed in partnership with the community and the private sector are now saving the municipality close to \$200,000 a year in policing costs.

What I want to bring before you is that we spent the last 30 years or so, as a collective, building up this equity. Given the challenging circumstances that we're in currently, is that an opportunity for us to think about how we leverage that equity to do multiple things? And then when we invest in housing—because the other piece that it does is, it allows us to employ local labour, it allows us to employ local developers, all, in turn, to really kick-start, especially our rural and northern communities.

That is my presentation to you today. Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Our next presenter is Black Creek Community Health Centre. Please state your name for the record, and you will have seven minutes for your presentation.

Ms. Michelle Westin: My name is Michelle Westin.

Ms. Cheryl Prescod: I'm Cheryl Prescod. I'm the executive director of Black Creek Community Health Centre.

Good evening, everyone. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak to you this evening. We are pleased to speak about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on residents of the northwest Toronto area—an area served by Black Creek, within the riding of Humber River–Black Creek, represented by municipal councillor Anthony Perruzza and MPP Tom Rakocovic. This area is well known, as it surrounds the intersection of Jane and Finch and boasts one of the most diverse communities in Canada, including a majority of Black Canadians.

I'd like to start by recognizing the work of all levels of government, for their efforts in slowing and containing the spread of COVID-19—through your strong and continued collaborative efforts. These efforts serve to protect all of us, all Canadians throughout this pandemic.

We'd now like to share our perspective of the impact of COVID-19 on this community, a community that's already burdened by many barriers to the social determinants of health, including housing, food security, income and employment. I'd urge this committee to ensure that in your deliberations, equity is at the centre of them.

Specifically, we are calling for infrastructure supports to expand community-based testing and contact tracing, to further mitigate and control outbreaks in a community hardest hit by COVID-19 cases. We're calling for investments in social determinants of health to address the health disparities in this community, through population-based planning and provision of appropriate spaces for service provision. Finally, we're calling for creation of jobs that really meet the new and emerging needs for members of this diverse community—jobs with livable wages and paid sick leave.

Now I'd like to turn it over to Michelle to talk about what we're seeing in the community that provides a rationale for these requests.

Ms. Michelle Westin: Good evening, everyone.

Having served the Black Creek, Jane and Finch community for over 30 years, we're seeing every day the impact of structural and systemic inequity on the health and vitality of our neighbourhoods. We know now that COVID-19 is not the great equalizer; it's the magnifier by which marginalized and racialized communities are now facing the brunt of suffering and loss. Whether it's data about COVID-19, diabetes, poverty, unemployment or housing—we know our community stands out. Close to 40% of our children are living in poverty, and it's one of the highest rates in the city of Toronto. Our families are waiting close to five times longer for subsidized housing than in other neighbourhoods. People here take some of the longest and most frequent trips on public transit to get to work and other essential services. The average household income here is almost half of the city average. We also know there's an income gap for racialized and newcomer Canadians. In our community, 74% identify as a visible minority, and more than half of our residents are newcomers.

All these barriers have a huge impact on health. Compared with the rest of the Central LHIN, we've got the highest prevalence rate for diabetes, COPD, asthma and hypertension. We've got the highest rates of high-acuity emergency department visits. We also have the lowest screening rates for preventive care, such as breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings.

One of our neighbourhoods, Glenfield-Jane Heights, was identified as having the highest number of cases of COVID-19 over the past months, as well as having the highest number of recent cases. And three of the top 10 neighbourhoods are within Black Creek CHC's service area.

Factory workers, retail customer service representatives, front-line workers such as PSWs, and workers with no fixed workplace or who leave for work before 6 or 7 are the ones who we know are getting COVID-19 the most. COVID-19 is hitting the most vulnerable the hardest: people who can't afford—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Michelle Westin: —to self-isolate, who can't take time off, who can't take paid sick days, those who are living in crowded apartments, who are already sick and poor and Black.

We know the Black community is making up 9% of Toronto's population but they make 21% of COVID-19 cases.

The collection of race-based data by the province is crucial to understanding how COVID-19 affects communities more than others, but we know the evidence has been there the whole time.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Can you unmute, please?

Ms. Cheryl Prescod: Sorry.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Go ahead, please. We missed your presentation for the last 10 or 15 seconds.

Ms. Cheryl Prescod: No doubt, COVID-19 has amplified the many challenges and disparities faced by people in northwest Toronto. Many of these disparities are addressed by our CHC, in partnership with other agencies in the community, some of which are struggling with the loss of funding and inadequate spaces for services. As we look to the future—recovery from COVID-19 and the possible second surge of COVID-19, combined with the fall and winter flu season—we and these agencies will continue to be burdened to provide the level of supports that residents need.

1710

These concerns are reinforced in a statement recently made by Dr. Tam: “Limiting disruptions to health, social and other support services during COVID-19 is a priority for all jurisdictions in Canada. These vital services protect overall health and well-being for all communities.”

Therefore, the importance of our call for action that was stated earlier—increased testing and contact tracing in the hardest-hit neighbourhoods such as northwest Toronto, but using strategies that think about the population needs of this community, like the Black community, the working poor, over-housed, and working with the community to develop these strategies.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Cheryl Prescod: Okay—again, the protection of vulnerable populations through addressing the social determinants of health.

Because of the need for spaces in the community, we would really ask for your help in reversing the decision of Metrolinx in not providing the much-needed space for these services in the community.

Finally, we urge you to support Black businesses in the community in providing jobs for those who have lost them. We know that the Black community, as Michelle said, has been hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis.

In conclusion, we recognize the economic challenges facing all of us, but in these problems we have to find solutions, in innovative ways. We need to find ways to help all communities live and thrive well—not just some communities; all of our communities. I hope that this committee and this government have the will to make those changes on behalf of those most at risk. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. We’ll start with the questions now.

Before we start with the questions, I would like to do an attendance check. MPP Rakocevic, if you could please confirm your attendance.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It’s Tom Rakocevic, MPP, in Humber River–Black Creek.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you.

We’ll start the first round of questions with the government. MPP Khanjin.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question is for Henry. Your comments about some of the infrastructure funding, specifically when it comes to housing—I just wanted to get your thoughts on the program that was announced by

Minister Clark, the Social Services Relief Fund, and whether or not that’s something you’re looking to apply to, what projects to apply that fund to specifically, how you’ve found that fund, and the ways it’s working and the ways things could be improved.

Mr. Henry Wall: That’s a very good question.

The first round of the Social Services Relief Fund, I would say, certainly was a safety net that we needed in our region. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the social challenges that we face in the district with respect to—you talk about housing, and housing is a topic that you’ll hear a lot about when you come to our region, just the lack of and the fact that many of our communities are in a housing crisis. In fact, our wait-list for affordable housing—in 2014, we had just under 400 families waiting for housing; that has now exceeded 1,200, just in a couple of years.

When you have a pandemic hit and you have a situation where you have 14, 15, 18 family members living in a two-bedroom home, the need for self-isolation—you just can’t. What we found through the first round of the SSRF funding was that we were able to work directly with communities in order to support families in hotels, set up isolation centres, convert existing public infrastructure to spaces where families could self-isolate.

The other thing is that the flexibility within the program—and I don’t know if it was intended, but we were certainly able to work within the parameters, where we were able to use the funding to directly support First Nations communities, as well. So instead of forcing families in our region to relocate communities, we were able to work with chief and council and with tribal councils to bring the supports directly to families in those communities.

I think we would have had a very different situation in the district of Kenora had it not been for that program, so seeing round 2 of that program—we’re certainly very excited, and I think it’s going to help in a very significant way.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Yes, and I thank you for acknowledging it is—because we had the first round and the second round, and of course there was the funding for shelters, as well, and the COVID-19 update by the finance minister.

I just wanted to ask you, as well, how the More Homes, More Choice legislation impacts the types of housing you’re able to bring online up in Kenora, and whether or not that is fitting the need of having that missing middle, sometimes, when we talk about housing.

Mr. Henry Wall: I think this is where there is still some work that needs to be done with respect to that legislation for it to be able to function at its full capacity. Without actually having the housing supply, some of the programs under that aren’t going to be very effective. No matter what the housing benefit is, no matter what the housing allowance or the support is, if the supply simply doesn’t exist, then it doesn’t matter.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Henry Wall: As the next piece, we do need to figure out, how do we create new housing, actually result

in building new housing? I think that this is in part with respect to rethinking the equity that's been built up over the last 30 years in the housing infrastructure and this idea that we shouldn't have debt. I think it's a very old way of thinking. Why don't we look at using the equity? In partnership with the private sector and in support with the Ontario government, we can leverage and build new housing so that the legislation and the programs that are currently in place have a way of doing the job that they're supposed to do. My concern is that if we don't, we'll still see the number of families waiting for housing grow, and the number of families who are precariously housed across Ontario will continue to grow.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: In summary, you'd like to see more housing supply?

Mr. Henry Wall: That is key, and I think that is a big struggle that Ontario needs to get sorted out.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Further questions? Two minutes. MPP Crawford.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to both the presenters for coming here today.

My question—I actually have a point, first, and a question for the Black Creek Community Health Centre. I want to thank you for the good work you do in the community you're in. I appreciate that. Maybe I misheard you, but I did hear you say something about the community hub, and I want to be clear that Minister Mulroney, on Monday, said that that community hub will go ahead with the Metrolinx community hub in the Jane-Finch area. I want you to be perfectly clear on that.

My question to you is, in terms of infrastructure, is there something in your community that's lacking? The purpose of today's committee is to find out how infrastructure can play a key role in economic recovery. What is there in your community that you think needs some help, in terms of infrastructure, that could help employment in your community?

Ms. Cheryl Prescod: May I first address that we did hear the announcement from Minister Mulroney about the community hub? We understand that the hub is planned to go ahead. However, we are asking that we are not expected to pay or compete for the cost of the land. This is an issue, in that the community needs spaces.

We have an incredible amount of issues with community violence; gun violence, in particular. Just last week, we've had a shooting almost every day. We have housing conditions that are just impossible, especially for the young people who live in this community. They are in disrepair. There are very few community and recreational spaces, and of course the COVID-19 lockdown has really increased that issue. Youth are in their spaces, in their stairwells, and this is where we need some help with housing—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Sorry to cut you off. The time has come up for the government side.

We'll move to the opposition now. MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you, Michelle, thank you, Cheryl, and thank you, Henry, for the presentations.

Certainly, when we talk about social determinants of health, when we talk about the ridings you're in and the riding I'm from—it's very similar on the issues that you're talking about. I think that's because of some of the racialized and Indigenous people who live in our areas. So thank you for that.

I'll direct my question to Henry. Can you expand a bit on some of the housing needs and some of the impacts they have on the lives of the people who are on the street? I know some time ago—I think it was 2018—the number of people in the past, in Sioux Lookout, and there were some stats that were very significant on police calls. Can you elaborate and share a little bit of that?

1720

Mr. Henry Wall: Yes, 2018 was actually quite a sad year. Sometimes we talk about ending homelessness, especially how do we end chronic homelessness, and our communities being hub communities that support families, particularly First Nation families, who have to leave their communities to access medical services, who have to leave their communities for their young people to even get a high school education—or if you are remanded, you have to leave your community and go through a justice system hundreds of kilometres away in a strange community. From that standpoint, it does create a situation where we have an incredibly high rate of homelessness as a result.

In particular, in Sioux Lookout in 2018, the death rate for those who experienced chronic homelessness was about 1.67 per 1,000 per capita. What that really translates into is the equivalent to about 10,000 people a year dying in the streets of Toronto—for those who are chronically homeless. It's a wake-up call that the most effective means of ending homelessness shouldn't be the elements. Our service board has really been working quite hard with this government. We are looking at creative housing options. This is where the supportive housing program in Sioux Lookout—we didn't care how it happened; it just had to happen. I want to give an example. We haven't seen housing development as much as we could. For that particular project, the Ministry of Health is a partner and MMAH is a partner, but in order to get the rent supplements for that project, the ministry had to have an agreement with the LHIN—Ontario Health north, now—and Ontario Health north now has to have an agreement with the hospital. The hospital has an agreement with the DSSAB, which is us, and we in turn take that and now we have an agreement with the developer. This is over a \$250-a-month rent supplement per unit. The amount of work that had to happen to create the financial environment for the developer to take the risk and develop this is incredibly difficult.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Henry Wall: I think there's an opportunity here, as a collective, to look at how the housing allowances and the rent supplements across the province are really structured—because if it's simply with service providers and not with the housing sector, you're not going to get housing developments. I think there is an opportunity to

look and ask how we streamline the various housing programs that exist in order for that to actually back and give the assurances to the housing provider so that they can take the risk; you go out and you finance a build.

This particular build in Sioux Lookout—50% of that build is financed through the private sector.

We have another build in Kenora—it is a bail aftercare program. It's a program solely dedicated for the purpose of supporting young, Indigenous people who have been remanded from the Far North, who need to be released on bail, so that they have housing with full supports around the clock, and so that when they arrive in Kenora with one or two charges, they don't, at the end of it, leave with 20, 30 or 40 charges. It's not unheard of, believe it or not, for an individual who has struggled with mental health and addictions to be arrested 100, 150 or 180 times a year in our region. What a terrible waste of resources, from all levels of government.

I'm a big advocate for housing, and I do think investing in housing is what we need to really grow our local economies—but also as a way of recovering from COVID-19.

I talk about capacity a lot. When we have the province spending an immense amount of resources on lights and sirens, that's not sustainable, so at some point, whether it's the Ministry of Health or whether it's the Ministry of Housing, we will run out of money. So I think we do need to look at how we actually rethink and use infrastructure as a means to curb our operating costs and also invest in our communities.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: One of the things that happens in our communities—it even happened in Kenora—is how to address people without homes. They tried to come up with an anti-loitering bylaw.

I know one of the things that people are sometimes afraid to talk about is racism.

I want to also bring up—if you can expand a bit on some of the important work that you've done through the organization during this pandemic.

Mr. Henry Wall: It has been a lot of work. We've been incredibly busy, but I will also say that through that, the relationships and the partnerships that have been developed as a result of it—one thing I will say that we do well in the north, I think, is that when the going gets tough, we get together and we make things work. Whether it's working with the chiefs to look at the Friendship Accord or whether it's working with the chiefs of Kenora Chiefs Advisory—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off.

We'll have to move to the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank all of our presenters for giving us this very important information that we do need to hear as we are thinking about infrastructure and how it relates to the recovery. Certainly, what you're saying with respect to housing—both of the presenters have talked about the value and the importance

and the need to include that in our infrastructure recovery plan.

I'm wondering, Henry, if you could continue on MPP Mamakwa's trajectory. I want to hear about how those people with no homes are being supported—particularly from your coordinating role in the DSSAB—especially if they're not accounted for in the numbers. That will determine the need and the services and the supports that are recognized.

Also, the real issue of racism—what is happening there to make it more fair and equitable?

Mr. Henry Wall: That's a very complex question. We could probably spend quite a bit of time discussing it, just to do it justice. You're absolutely correct. We talk about homelessness, but I think we also need to talk about what defines homelessness, and through whose eyes. Many people who are couch surfing or who are living, as I mentioned, with 18 or more individuals in one home would not consider themselves as being precariously housed or as being homeless, so that does go unreported. When we report to the ministry—last year, we had over 2,000 people in Sioux Lookout, Kenora and Red Lake go through an emergency shelter; we know that number is much higher.

That's the other piece: When we talk about home development and creating homes, we have this idea that it needs to be a square box with a roof; not necessarily what actually constitutes a home for somebody. That has really caused us to rethink, when it comes to development, are we creating homes, or are we just creating housing—from that, too, where is the housing best located?

As the DSSAB, we could just go and build some of it ourselves, and that would be fine—but then are we trying to fix Indigenous people? Rather, maybe we need to just get out of the way and set the environment so that Indigenous people actually have an opportunity and a fair shot at creating housing. This is where a number of the creative housing developments and the very successful housing developments that we've seen are—where we, with our municipalities, have actually acquired the land, rezoned the land. And that has its own issues—going through a rezoning process. That's where we've really seen racism come out across our communities. But we get it all ready, and then we have handed it over to an Indigenous housing developer. It's very successful when you do that, what it does to actually create—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Henry Wall: —a sense of community. We've done some work, but we have a long way to go to be able to address this. I think that if we don't address homelessness, it does amplify racism. It's always, "Well, if we didn't have those people, we wouldn't have these high policing costs," or, "If we didn't have those people, we wouldn't have these issues in our downtown." It's a challenge. I think this is where we cannot ignore the fact that we need to have more homes in the north. I think that is going to address racism.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I agree with you. I think that this issue is very deep and it requires more in terms of unpacking it.

In your role as the chief administrator, you definitely have such a handle on the data and the need, whether it's coordinating housing, child care and those types of services and supports for the community. I was wondering if you could tell this committee what more we can do in terms of deconstructing some of the things that do tie your hands, to do things in a more responsive way to the needs of the community.

1730

Mr. Henry Wall: I think, in part, we do need to rethink rent geared to income, because what that is really doing is restricting—I keep talking about housing equity; it's really restricting that. If we start rethinking that, it doesn't mean that we will lose affordable housing. Since RGI has come to be, we have housing allowances; we have housing benefit programs; we have Ontario Works; we have ODS shelter allowances. The list of government supports is quite extensive, yet we seem to be afraid to talk about how we actually rethink rent geared to income. I think by doing that, we're not shifting cost, but what we are doing is we are taking the things that restrain us from developing housing, using existing housing, using existing revenue to reinvest in more housing.

I'll give an example. The housing stock that we have—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Henry Wall: —we probably have over \$100 million worth of equity that we could utilize today. But rent geared to income is really limiting our revenue-generating ability if we leave all these other supports to the side that families can access. I think that's something that we should be looking at.

The other piece, too, that I had mentioned is streamlining housing allowances, rent supplements. Right now, they're across multiple ministries and that, I think, needs to be coordinated. I'm not saying that housing providers should be involved in the delivery of mental health and addictions—but if they worked in partnership, where the mental health and addictions agencies or program providers had the program dollars and the housing provider had access to the housing piece. I think that is the true intent of the Ontario health teams, but I think we need to expand that to begin with the services sector.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I also think—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Okay. We'll pick this up.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll start the second round with the opposition side. MPP Rakocevic.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My round of questioning will be to the Black Creek Community Health Centre. I want to thank them so much for their important work in providing important health services in our community. Certainly, during COVID-19, they have been on the front lines battling this and really improving the lives of people in our area, advocating for more funding and so many important things.

One of the things in their presentation, which was very excellent and informative, talked about the social determinants of health, and in particular with regard to investments.

We touched on the community hub promise to the Jane and Finch community as part of the Metrolinx LRT. We were all surprised and disappointed to see a reversal on moving forward. I had written to the minister and we've heard that they may continue on the plan, but what we've been calling for is a transfer of land. Do you support the land actually being transferred so that we don't leave it to a later date, when history could repeat itself? And could you tell us what such a hub could do for the health of our community?

Ms. Cheryl Prescod: Of course, as I said earlier, the access to land and space in this community for programs, whether for youth or seniors, is very limited. As you all may know, it's a very densely populated neighbourhood, so land is at a premium. Even though the housing conditions may be poor, it's very expensive. Market rent is expensive. So having the transfer of lands to the community safeguards the community having some sort of ownership and agency over that land and what can be done in the space.

This community has felt very left out of service-delivery investments for a long time. It's very sporadic. What's needed is something long-term and sustainable that the community could call its own. I do believe that that will make a big difference to some of the issues, the social ills, that are currently plaguing the community in addition to COVID-19.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: You also talked about how COVID-19 is, in fact, amplifying the inequities that we're seeing in our community. Why don't you tell us a little bit about some of the daily lives community members who come to you seeking help face? We are in a racialized community. We've just learned—and we've always known—that this has been hitting different communities very differently. You are serving some of the neighbourhoods hardest hit by COVID-19, so why don't you tell us a little bit about what the daily lives of some of the people who come to you for help are like?

Ms. Cheryl Prescod: In addition to the issues of food security—we've been distributing food. We've been working collaboratively with many different community agencies, like others across the city, the province, have been doing, to help with that. The affordability of things has just gone—it's so hard on people living here.

We have many PSWs who work in the community. As you know, long-term care has been a place that has been hit.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Ms. Cheryl Prescod: The staff themselves, especially the PSWs, many of whom are racialized and, in particular, Black, have nursing degrees from other countries but are unable to work in Canada, are working in these jobs, and they're working many jobs because the pay is very low. Multiple jobs, multiple visits and time on transit are really what's causing some of the issues and the spread of the disease. We really need to think about, again, those jobs.

Many of the women-led families in this community are suffering because of domestic violence, because of involvement of their children with CAS, because of some of

the schooling issues and child care issues—multiple issues that we see and we try to mitigate through counselling services and others. Again, it's enormous, and the need for investments is there. The hospitals in the acute-care sector were very well poised and prepared for this; however, communities were not, especially communities with multiple barriers, like this community, and they face racism every day.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Could you tell us about the importance and the need to invest in more mobile testing in our community? I know that we've just finished a few dates on that, and you've been so helpful in getting the word out—but the need for ongoing, more locations and dates as we forward, and to address that more funds need to be spent in the places where they're needed most, like our community.

Ms. Cheryl Prescod: Yes. We've done a few mobile pop-up sites; however, I think we need a variety of strategies. What we're finding is that people have a lack of trust in some of the assessment centres that are set up in the hospitals, and so we need to go to them. We need to create increased trust through using community outreach workers—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Cheryl Prescod:—who know their language, who know their culture, who they can trust—they have a higher degree of trust, so just having the ability to go to the places where people are at.

Those seniors in those buildings, people with mobility issues, people on the streets, who are homeless, who are dealing with mental health and addictions issues—they're all here, and they're all compromising everyone else in the neighbourhood, because they will infect others. We have to do more to stop that spread.

Today, we were lucky to have some donated masks, which our community centre will be distributing around the community. With new bylaws around having to wear masks everywhere—and folks who cannot afford to buy the masks will get these free of charge. Again, this is what we have to do collectively to protect everyone, including ourselves, our staff and members of the community, every single one of them.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): We'll go to the independent members now. MPP Hunter.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the presenters again. You're really giving this committee examples of what we can do to support all people in the recovery.

Henry, you were summarizing, and I was about to say, that's really what a universal basic income was meant to address—all of those very needs, and giving individuals, first of all, that dignity of having an income, but also the freedom to improve their education, to try different things without necessarily having to wonder where their next meal is going to be coming from, and making sure that they're securely housed. So I definitely hear you.

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I have to move on to the Black Creek Community Health Centre. When I look at the data on COVID-19, I see how this region of Toronto, the northwest corner, is

really the epicentre of this virus in our province in terms of the number of cases. And my community that I represent, which is in the east end, in Scarborough, is a mirror—it's just that it's not as intense a hot spot as you are. I really see the need to make sure that the interventions that we're doing as a province, whether it's health or infrastructure and jobs and employment and recovery, have a lens that reaches these communities—or education, for that matter. If the virus is still circulating, then we can't just create a standard norm without understanding that the risk is greater in these communities and the resources are less to deal with it.

You were talking about masks. I have been long advocating for the government to make masks available in these hot spots, because where the virus continues to circulate, it is a risk to the entire province; it's not going to just stay in one place. So I do want you to take the time that we have and tell us, in terms of what you believe—whether it's physical infrastructure or social infrastructure—needs to come forward to support the Black Creek community.

Ms. Michelle Westin: As Cheryl said, it takes multiple strategies. It takes coordination and collaboration by all sectors and all levels of government.

As we've heard from Henry and Cheryl, there's a real need for investment in infrastructure in our communities. We know that our apartments are falling apart and they're old. We know that our transit could be better. All of those things help to create vibrant, sustainable, contributing communities.

I think the social supports are so necessary, as well, and I think they're interconnected. We rely so much on our social service partners, because we do recognize that health also means mental health; it means connecting to services. These organizations need support, as well. They're the ones that are able to actually connect with the youth in the community, gain their trust and provide them with spaces where they feel safe. From that, people will prosper and do a lot better.

So I think it takes both; absolutely.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Two minutes.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Talk a little bit more about the community hub. When I saw what happened, my reaction was, "Why create that doubt in the community's mind?" You were mobilizing your ideas toward solving root issues of violence, of poverty, breaking cycles of poverty and giving people hope and inspiration. That doubt now makes people feel as if something that they have been working toward in an aspirational way could be threatened in the future. Could you talk a little bit about the assurances that you are now demanding and what that will mean for the community, in terms of this arts hub that is to be done in partnership with Metrolinx and the province and other supporters?

Ms. Michelle Westin: As Cheryl mentioned before, this is a community that has had real trust broken with the system generationally, years and years gone by. To build this hub was their dream. This was something that was truly led, built, planned by the community. They designed

it, and this was their dream. As a community that is, frankly, very immersed in government processes—this was a very process-heavy piece. The community went through all of the planning involved and followed all of the processes that needed to be done, and yet they were given the worst news possible. So I do feel that, as we've mentioned before, that trust needs to be rebuilt. We do need some assurances.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Ms. Michelle Westin: This is a community that has not been, historically, as invested in as other parts of the city. We know that that land will assure us of that long-term commitment to our community by the government.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Chair, how much time is left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Forty seconds.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Maybe I can just go back to Henry—because I know housing will benefit both locations. You haven't mentioned portable housing supplements. How will that free up the ability for people to find housing?

Mr. Henry Wall: Strictly speaking, for the north and particularly for our district, we do not have the infrastructure or the housing supply for a housing benefit to really work in our region. As I had mentioned, the wait-list for our housing has more than tripled over the last four years alone. I think we have more families waiting for housing than we have size of communities.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: So the bottom line is, you need more housing—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Thank you so much. Time is up.

We'll move to the government side now. MPP Cho.

Mr. Stan Cho: Thank you to all the presenters for being with us this afternoon.

It's not surprising that housing has been a topic of discussion today. It certainly was the case as we travelled the province doing our pre-budget consultations. It came up in every corner of this province, from urban areas to rural areas. What we know is that there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to housing throughout our province. The common elements are, of course, the supply and demand imbalance and the demand. Even in our rural areas, that's the case.

Mr. Wall, you're confirming that here with us this afternoon. But in your case, in Kenora and the surrounding area, it's more unique than some of the rural areas in some other parts of our province. Part of that has to do with your proximity to our provincial neighbours to the west. Before I continue on the line of questioning, I'm wondering if you could tell me, just how prevalent is that back-and-forth, interprovincial travel between Manitoba and Ontario in your area?

Mr. Henry Wall: I have the pleasure of co-chairing the only Ontario health team in northwestern Ontario. With that, we do have a lot of conversation with Manitoba, because that is so integrated with our health system in our region. Even when we talk about Thunder Bay, we're almost better off looking at, how do we work with to the west of us? I know there is a provincial line on the map,

but in terms of people moving back and forth, accessing services, health, even living, it's such a blurred line. So it's a very close relationship, and we have families moving back and forth all the time.

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm really glad you put that on the record, Mr. Wall, because that is something very unique to that area of our province. We have to be aware of that and how that impacts your region and the demand on your housing.

I'm wondering if you would be in favour of a joint championing to the federal government of assistance there, because you are an interprovincial hub and that does require some federal dollars. That's part one of the question.

The second part of the question is: Let's say we are able to help increase that access to supply in the area. What are your barriers? Is labour a problem? Would you be expecting much of that labour to come from our partners in Manitoba as well, and how do we address the shortage, if there is one?

Mr. Henry Wall: To the first question: Yes. I think we need all hands on deck, and we do need all levels of government. We often feel like we're almost a Ping-Pong ball being bounced around in this jurisdictional dispute in terms of who is responsible. Ultimately, we need to look after our communities. It's about community; it's about human beings. All levels of government need to just get out of their own way and see how we work together to make things better.

We did an interesting project just a couple of months ago, because what we were finding was that as we did a housing project in partnership, most of the labour was actually coming from out of province, as far as BC. We said, "What in the world? Why is that? This is about local development, having local labour, having Indigenous labour." So what we did with this one project to level the playing field—and it takes capacity. It takes time to build capacity for developers, so if you have not built anything substantial in a community for quite some time, the developers that are there won't have the capacity to do it. What we did in this particular case is that we actually paid developers to bid, be part of the bidding process. It was all—

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): Three minutes.

Mr. Henry Wall: What we found is that, ultimately, the best organization still got the job. It was a local developer, local labour. The engineers, architects—all local.

When we look at labour, sometimes we need to rethink how we go about asking for—looking at tenders, as an example. We can do that within the existing structure. We just have to get out of our own way to do it. I think we can still do the same thing.

I keep talking about this equity that we have that could be unlocked in this unprecedented time. Not necessarily with more money from the province—similar to what we did with end of operating agreements, where Ontario and Canada backed those mortgages for years but it allowed

the housing to be developed. Could we not be looking at doing the same thing and utilizing local labour to do that? That becomes a skills development process of its own. We then support our communities in the capacity building; we create tradesmen and tradeswomen. That's one way to end the cycle of poverty. If we give people the hammer and the tools, they for themselves can also end homelessness.

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate that. That's very insightful, Mr. Wall. I'm sure you have many other great ideas. I'd invite you to send that at another time. I'd be happy to read that off-line, too.

Mr. Chair, how much do we have left?

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): One minute.

Mr. Stan Cho: Okay.

To our friends at the Black Creek community: Jane and Finch was my second home on the weekends. My grandparents had an apartment on Yewtree, and I know the Jane Finch Mall very well. So the challenges you presented here resonate very clearly with me. I grew up watching the challenges of the neighbourhood. My challenge back to you is to continue to send us those specific asks for the structural and infrastructure improvements that would lead

to better outcomes for the people of that community who desperately need that help.

You touched on a great point, Ms. Prescod, when you talked about the foreign workers who come here and their credentials are not recognized. I, too, am a passionate believer that we need to recognize foreign credentials, so that we have qualified people who can do better than some of the jobs that they're working right now, and we give them those opportunities to succeed.

Certainly, I'm very sympathetic to what you've presented to us, and I look forward to hearing future ideas as we move on. Thank you to all.

The Chair (Mr. Amarjot Sandhu): That concludes our time, and that concludes our business for today. Thank you to both of the presenters for your time and for your presentations.

As a reminder, the deadline to send in a written submission will be 6 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time, on August 11.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on August 4, when we will meet to continue hearings on the infrastructure sector.

The committee adjourned at 1753.

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