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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 25 February 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 25 février 2020

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING TRANSIT FASTER ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020

SUR LA CONSTRUCTION PLUS RAPIDE
DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 24, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act to enact the Building Transit Faster Act, 2020 and make related amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 171, Loi édictant la Loi de 2020 sur la construction plus rapide de transport en commun et apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to speak to this bill, Bill 171. As you might well guess, Speaker, this bill is contentious in my riding, as is the Ontario Line itself. The Ontario Line is contentious not because people don't want transit; they desperately want and need transit. It's contentious because bad design and bad consultation leave people fearful that their lives will be unnecessarily upended.

For years, my constituents have been pressing for transit investment. People in my riding find that they can't get on the streetcar in the morning, and when they get on, they're packed in like sardines. They can't get on the streetcar to come home at the end of the day. People go to Pape subway station to get on the subway to go to work and find they have to wait multiple trains before they can actually get on the subway train and get to work. And so, when I go door-to-door talking to people about transit, it comes up constantly: "When will something be done so that I can actually get to work in a timely way? How can that happen?"

Frankly, Speaker, a number of years ago when the city of Toronto came forward with its proposal for a relief line and held public meetings in my riding about the design of that relief line, there was a huge amount of optimism.

It was not an easy process; the city actually consulted at length, held a number of public meetings, listened to the concerns and critiques of the people in my community and, ultimately, settled it. Meetings were quite rowdy. The direction or the route of that line was changed in the course of those consultations, as practical issues were pointed out

by the community and, in the end, accepted and turned into reality by the city of Toronto. People knew that there would be disruptions because we know where the excavation holes were going to be put for the tunnel-boring machines. Pape Avenue would have been shut down for an extended period, or greatly restricted. People's homes would be expropriated. In fact, people got expropriation notices. People were not happy about having their lives disrupted. Who is? But they were happy that finally something was going to move forward and they'd be able to get to work.

I want to point this out, because I know there are some people who will say, "You don't like the Ontario Line because you have a 'not in my backyard' approach." This is a community that has supported a major construction project going through it to deal with transit issues. But they do object to bad design and poor treatment through missing consultation with the community.

Before I talk about the content of the bill and its associated regulations, I want to note some of the concrete problems that people in my community face because of poor design and poor consultation.

In the south end of my riding, the Ontario Line will come above ground for about two kilometres, through a residential area. This area has homes that were built in the late 1800s, so homes are very close to the existing rail lines. That's just the way things were done. When people moved in, they understood that there were rail lines. But now we have an issue with noise from trains, which people live with. If you're in my riding at rush hour and the trains are going by, you have to stop speaking. Trains go by every seven and a half to 10 minutes. The GO system is being upgraded so trains can be more frequent, and people in my community support that. They need the necessary modifications—the safety barriers and the noise barriers. They understand the need for that increase in transit investment. But when you say that we're going to have GO trains not every seven and a half to 10 minutes but every three and a half minutes, and subway trains going past every 45 seconds, it's going to be very difficult to hold a conversation outside. I have to say to all of you: We've been through the consultations with Metrolinx on sound barriers. Substantial questions have not been addressed, and the community is deeply frustrated that they can't get answers to their questions about where sound barriers will go and how they will be upgraded in response to the concerns of the community. That is a substantial concern for people. How will you actually have a conversation outside?

Jimmie Simpson Recreation Centre, which is the major recreation centre in the southwest quadrant of my riding,

is at risk because you have to widen the railway right-of-way. It's possible that the centre will have to be taken down. In any event, you may well have trains immediately beside the west wall of that centre, changing the experience people are going to have inside.

Fontbonne Ministries is a home for women who have had difficulty getting housing. They're fragile. They're seniors. With the widening of the right-of-way, you may well have trains right up against the side wall of that ministry. The Sisters of St. Joseph talked to me about the need to protect the women who live there and their homes.

Pape Avenue school—just about the point about where this train is going to come above ground. We don't yet know the impact there. Will there have to be an impact on the schoolyard, on the school itself?

When I ask Metrolinx staff about all three cases, they say, "We don't think we're going to have to do anything there. We think they're safe." I ask, "Can you give me a guarantee? Show me the document where these three places are protected." I can't get that.

Along the side of the railway lines, a number of spots are the park space that we have in that part of town, in an area that's parks-deficient already. It's clear that if you expand the railway right-of-way, we're going to have much smaller or no parks in that area.

In the north end of my riding, people felt that the process, where they woke up one day, read the newspaper and found out there was a subway train going through their street and that they may be expropriated, was not an appropriate way to let people know that their lives were going to change. When the city of Toronto was doing its Relief Line North consultations, they had public meetings. They showed people a variety of routes. There was discussion. People had some sense of, "Okay, this may be coming." But all of that was cancelled, and people simply got a line on a map and noticed their lives were about to change. That is not good public management. That is not good consultation.

The Premier's ministers have said they need to build the Ontario Line above ground through two kilometres of my riding in order to save money. It's expensive going underground, and I don't argue that for a minute. It is. But expense was certainly not on the Premier's mind when he announced, in April 2019, that the Eglinton west LRT extension would be built "underground, where it belongs." We're talking about a four-lane highway going through Etobicoke Centre, and, if you look at Google Earth, you can see the industrial plazas and the shopping plazas. We're not talking about putting a large LRT right beside a residential area or through a residential area; you're going through a highway. But he felt it was important to put that underground.

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The business case for the Eglinton west extension, the LRT, was prepared by the city in 2016. The city looked at a variety of options. The least costly option was the LRT above ground, down the middle of that road. They calculated, on present value of cost, that it would be \$3.4 billion. What the Premier opted for was calculated at \$4.7 billion.

So if there's a shortage of money, I've got to ask: What's the Premier thinking? If he wants a light rail transit system built underground through the riding where he lives and above ground in a riding that he doesn't hold—if we're in a situation when it comes to a riding that he doesn't hold, where, unfortunately, there was no money: "We went to the piggy bank. Too bad, so sad. You're going to have a very noisy life." I can't describe in parliamentary language what kind of approach this is, but you, Speaker, may be able to think it through and come to your own conclusions.

The minister has told us that we need this act to get transit built, and I just want to note very briefly a history of the Conservative approach to building transit. In 1995, when the Harris government was elected, the province and the city were building the Eglinton subway system. What happened 25 years ago to that subway that we aren't able to take right now? Well, it was stopped and the tunnels were filled in with concrete. People say, "Why can't we build transit in Toronto?" Well, I'll tell you why: Sometimes you get governments elected that decide to fill in subway tunnels with concrete. That system would be operating today if it had not been stopped then.

In 2010, the election of the Ford administration in Toronto: At the point of that election, a \$6-billion project of light rail transit had been agreed to for, let me get it right, Eglinton, Finch, Sheppard and Scarborough—cancelled. That's rapid transit that would be running today if it had not been cancelled. That is the record of a Premier who did what he could to make sure that transit, in fact, didn't happen.

If this government says it wants to speed up transit, first of all, I want it to look at itself and look at its record. But I also want it to note that the relief line had its environmental assessment done, passed, approved; design was well under way; construction was supposed to start this year. And what happened with the relief line? It has been pushed back. So a government that says that it's in a hurry to get transit in place: Look at its history, look at its most recent actions, and that is not what we see.

This government has brought forward this bill and it has brought forward associated regulations—the details, the fine work—that allow people to know precisely what legal framework they're working with. There's a really important point here that people need to understand: that environmental issues and their resolutions can be set aside if the Minister of the Environment thinks that those issues and their resolution are going to be unduly delaying the project. That's extraordinary for a Minister of the Environment.

I'll read the summary posted by the government on the Environmental Registry: "The Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks will be able to intervene in the Metrolinx-led issues response process"—the response to environmental issues—"to modify any measures proposed by Metrolinx in response to issues and concerns"—environmental, health and safety—"if the minister is of the view that the proposed measures could delay the timely delivery of these projects."

In other words, Speaker, the environment and health and safety are not the top issue for the Minister of the Environment. He has permission to set those aside if it slows down this project. That is extraordinary. People need to let that sink in. The message for the Minister of the Environment is not to protect the local environment or to protect the health and safety of residents near the transit line, but explicitly he has or she has the power to block measures that could delay the timely delivery of these projects.

So if Metrolinx identifies an environmental problem in the course of its study and provides a solution to protect human health and safety, that solution can be blocked by the Minister of the Environment if he or she thinks it can slow down the project. That is an extraordinary rewrite of the responsibilities of the Minister of the Environment. I think that the minister needs a new title: the Minister of Rubber-Stamp Approvals; the Minister of Expediting Projects and Setting Aside Concerns; or the Minister of “Go to Sleep Now, Little Baby, Don’t You Cry; Everything Is Fine.” I think it’s amazing that this would be put forward by any government, frankly.

I also want to talk about the fact that the environmental assessment is set up so that you can have early works and later works. You can get an approval for some early works, and then you can start this project without having done a full environmental review of the impacts of this project.

Speaker, first of all, this is an \$11-billion project. If you are proceeding with an \$11-billion project and you’ve made a mistake in the first stage and only caught it later on, then you’re going to be stuck with some very expensive redoing. When I spoke about this last week, I talked about a saying that carpenters have, which is: Measure twice and cut once. Do you know what? It’s an amazing thing: That actually makes a lot of sense. What’s being put in place here is a system where you can cut as much as you want and you figure it out later. You might have to glue it all back together—if you can.

Some might say, “Okay, well, the early works: We’re just talking minor stuff—things that won’t have a big impact on people’s lives and on the cost of this project.” But I want to read the definition of early works, because they’re actually fairly substantial. “Early works” means any components of the Ontario Line project that Metrolinx proposes to proceed with before the completion of the Ontario Line assessment process—you know, that environmental assessment process rubber-stamping sort of thing. So components such as station construction, rail corridor expansion, utility relocation or bridge replacement or expansion—we’re talking early works; we’re talking some pretty big projects. In fact, it leads to the question: What’s left once you’ve done all that?

What happens if this early work poses problems when you do the environmental assessment later for the project as a whole? Are we going to have a minister who has been told, “Get it done and get it done now,” say, “Oh, no, we have to stop for a minute. We have to correct the errors we made and fix things so the environmental problems and the health and safety problems are dealt with”?

Speaker, there is at least one spot on the Union Pearson Express route, and there may be others, where sound barriers were promised by Metrolinx and never put in place. Why? Because they had put in place another structure earlier that didn’t have the strength to support the sound barrier. Too bad, so sad. I feel badly for the people who are having to put up with noise because they messed up on design. Metrolinx shows no urgency about replacing that structure so you can have the sound barrier that was required in the environmental assessment.

In many ways I think what we’re seeing is a bill and associated regulations being put together to protect Metrolinx, to protect the province and to protect the private sector proponent, and not to protect the community and the environment. That is not the way things should be done here in Ontario. That is a major problem.

I want to note that my colleague from University–Rosedale, our transit critic, had some interesting things to say about this bill just the other day. I want to repeat some of what she had to say. I’m quoting her: “I ... want to respond to ... the Minister of Transportation’s remark that this government is working in partnership with the city of Toronto. Let’s be super clear about what that actually means. Yes, the city of Toronto, with a gun to their head, agreed to support these new transit projects on the condition that the rest of the transit system was not taken away from the city of Toronto against their consent.”

0920

You know, that’s pretty powerful incentive: “I won’t take away your subway system if you agree to what I put forward. You’ve got a nice store here, Mr. Mayor. Shame if something happened to it.” That’s the kind of dynamics we’re dealing with.

“We should also put in context that the city of Toronto asked for numerous things to be part of the negotiations with the government when we move forward with these transit lines. Those requests included keeping maintenance under the city’s control.” And because there was concern at the city about the impact on the above ground section—“The city ... made it very clear that they wanted this province to listen to those residents and to work to identify and mitigate some of the concerns around noise and construction, and if those concerns could not be mitigated, then the option to go underground is something that should” have moved forward with this. Our critic says, “I have met with Ministry of Transportation officials as well as Metrolinx officials, and they have not shown any interest in moving forward on the city of Toronto’s requests.”

I can see my time is limited, but I want to touch on just a few points: the change and the expropriation rules process reduces the ability of citizens to deal with unjust, unfair or simply erroneous decisions on expropriation. You’re going to need expropriation in this situation. You’re going to need it with any major project like this. But frankly, to say to citizens, “If we made a mistake, tough luck,” is not the way to approach it. It undermines people’s confidence that, in fact, they’re dealing with a fair and reasonable system.

Speaker, there's much that I had to say, but I want to just quickly address this. The minister says that these powers will just be used as a backstop. I don't believe that's the case. If the government wants to get transit rolling, it needs to rewrite this bill, it needs to move away from privatized construction design, the private-public partnership model, which the Auditor General of Ontario has said cost Ontarians so much money—in the many billions. It needs to build real community support, which means real consultation and a willingness to vary design based on what's heard, and it needs to allocate the money. And if it does those things, if it has community support and good design, then this will go ahead quickly. And if it doesn't, it won't.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I personally take the GO train and subway every day to Queen's Park, and I can tell you that the overwhelming majority of commuters I talk to—and I do talk to them on the GO train and the subway—are supportive of our government's plan with respect to transit. Try taking the subway at peak hours right now. It's unbelievable. There's absolutely no room, and there's been no major subway expansion in decades in Toronto due to government incompetence. All three levels of government have supported our approach to transit. I ask: Why is the official opposition not supporting us like the other levels of government from different political parties? This has never happened before in Canada, with all three levels of government supporting transit. My question to the member opposite is: Does he not recognize that the Building Transit Faster Act—how important it is for future generations?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: There are a few points that I'd like to address. First off, I support transit expansion. My party supports transit expansion. When your party cancelled the Eglinton subway back in the 1990s, we opposed that. When the Ford administration at city hall cancelled a fully funded program of building LRT, we opposed the Ford administration doing that. So now you're saying, decades later, "Well, now we care about transit." Well, so do we. But the fact that those projects got killed off, and now you've killed off the relief line, which could be under construction now, it really makes me doubt that you have that great support for transit. If your government did, it would not have killed off the relief line. That is the exhibit A of this case.

Yes, we need transit. We're going to have to see what can be made out of the Ontario Line, revamp it, deal with the design issues—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to thank the member from Toronto–Danforth for his contribution to this debate. We know that transit is an issue throughout Ontario. Even in the city of London, there have been challenges around transit.

But the member brought up an interesting point about the above ground line that's going to be two kilometres in

Toronto–Danforth, as opposed to the line that's going to be underground when he referred to the riding of the Premier. I'd like to know: What evidence did the government present to justify it, other than the dollar amount? Our member talked about how there is a discrepancy, and it's actually cheaper. What additional evidence does the government provide to justify that underground as opposed to above ground in different ridings?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I haven't seen any evidence from the government to justify that. All we had from the Premier with regard to putting the Eglinton West LRT underground was that this is a busy highway. It probably is a busy highway. Eglinton is a busy road. We have busy roads in the city; I've noticed that. But the economics are—it's a \$1.4-billion difference—that putting an LRT along a main road saves a lot of money. Putting a subway above ground, down through a residential area built up against a railway line, I don't think is justifiable. I haven't heard from the government—even the numbers; I can't get the numbers. I've asked what the underground cost and what's the above ground cost is on the Ontario Line in my riding—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Response.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I have to join the debate today and ask a question of the member from Toronto–Danforth. I heard him, during his debate, talk about his concern over noise. Through the years, we have agreed to disagree on certain things, but when I heard him today speaking about his concern of noise, I can't help but be a little heartened. I have to ask the member from Toronto–Danforth: Are you going to exercise that same concern in rural Ontario when it comes to industrial wind turbines and the noise that's created for the people who live within 550 metres of those turbines?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the question from the minister. It's a salient question. I think that there does need to be a barrier in distance between a windmill and a home, and I would ask that the same criteria be applied to the Ontario Line in my riding. At 500 metres, you would have to go underground. In my riding, we would accept 500 metres. We'd accept it today—offer given, offer taken. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank my colleague the member for Toronto–Danforth for his remarks. He ended his speech with some very serious cautions about engaging or expanding P3 models of transit building. He mentioned the Auditor General's report, which found that taxpayers are paying significantly more for P3 projects than they would if they were publicly funded. I am interested in hearing his thoughts about the P3 model and whether this is an appropriate way to proceed with transit projects in Ontario.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the question from my colleague. No, obviously, I don't think it's a good way to proceed. What we're having is a rewrite of environmental

assessments to accommodate P3s. That in itself raises huge questions about proceeding with the project before it's completely assessed, and, frankly, undermining the ability of the public to intervene and help reshape a project when problems are obvious and the private sector proponent is going to ignore everything that the community has to say. That's one level.

The other level is just simply cost. We've looked at the Eglinton Crosstown, which is a P3. These public-private partnerships were billed as taking all the risk out of public hands, putting it in private hands and making sure things got built on time. It's much slower than promised, and it's way over budget.

0930

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question, of course, is to the member from Toronto—Danforth.

The role of the opposition, clearly, is to oppose policy, legislation—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Well, it is—that is presented in the Legislature, and we've heard that. Members across the aisle have opposed almost every aspect of the Building Transit Faster Act, despite the fact that if you travel anywhere in the city of Toronto, you are forced to deal with increasing congestion. You have opposed this piece of legislation, but like so many other things that we have brought forward, you have not brought a solution forward.

What is your proposal to get transit projects built faster in the city of Toronto?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, I appreciate the question from the member. I guess there are a few things: Don't cancel projects that are ready to be built. The relief line was ready for construction. We'd be under construction now if you hadn't cancelled it. That's one suggestion: When you've got a shovel-ready project, build it. That isn't what has happened. I think we'd have less congestion if you'd decided to go ahead with the project that was there, but you didn't.

Don't cancel projects like the light-rail transit that had been proposed and cancelled in 2010 by the Ford administration in the city of Toronto. We would have a whole bunch of transit built and operating.

Don't stop subway construction that's already under way and fill the tunnels in with concrete if you think you're in favour of transit.

If those two things in 1995 and 2010 had not happened, we'd have a lot more transit in the city and much less congestion. So when I have this government come and say—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

We have time for a very quick question and a very quick answer. Question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm going to concise my question: This government does not have a good track record on public consultation. I wanted to ask the member

what advice he would give the government in order to engage the public better around consultation with this massive transit project that they're proposing.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I guess a few things: In terms of actually holding meetings, don't just have an open house where you have placards around the room that people can look at and ask a few questions of staff who are there; have a forum where people as a group can ask questions and have those questions answered by politicians and senior staff. That's one thing.

Let people know what's going on. I know that people in my riding had geophysical testing happening on their streets without notice it was going to happen. Suddenly, they had these big boring machines up and down their streets, asking themselves, "What's going on here?"

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: It gives me great pleasure to speak to Bill 171, the proposed Building Transit Faster Act, legislation that will help deliver Ontario's four priority subway projects on time and on budget.

As the MPP for Richmond Hill, I know that my constituents are excited to see the government build a world-class transportation network that will boost economic growth, relieve congestion, and get people to work and back to their homes and to their loved ones on time. This legislation is a key step forward to unlocking the gridlock, relieving congestion and generating long-term economic and employment opportunities in the greater Toronto area.

My constituents in Richmond Hill have experienced many disappointments in the past decades. The need for a good transit system has been demanded by my community for a long time. It has been a great challenge for the business community. The travelling time to serve clients, especially downtown, is far too time-consuming. We all know that time is money. It cuts right into their profit margin.

Not only does it create challenges for businesses; it makes it difficult for students attending universities downtown. Travelling time eats into their studying time and, often, into their sleeping time, while most parents—I'm sure some of you have the experience—have to rent an apartment for their children to relieve them from time-consuming travelling.

Each year, we lose billions of dollars due to gridlock. We are the government who will finally put an end to the problem and provide necessary relief for commuters.

Having a subway right into Richmond Hill and making it easier for all of York region is the number one request from my constituents in Richmond Hill. I made the promise in my election campaign to bring the subway into Richmond Hill. When I got elected, I did not have to push much, in fact, to get this on the agenda, because the government already understands the urgency and is committed to getting the province moving. This is why the announcement of a subway to Richmond Hill last year was overwhelmingly received. Thank you for helping me in fulfilling my promise to my people. I am proud of my government that when promises are made, promises are kept.

Not only do we have a subway to Richmond Hill through the Yonge North subway extension; we also have the brand new Ontario Line, the three-stop Scarborough subway extension and the Eglinton Crosstown West extension for a total of \$28.5 billion in investments.

What a brilliant plan, especially the Ontario Line, connecting the Ontario Science Centre to Ontario Place. It gets people moving from Don Mills all the way to downtown, without just crowding over to the Yonge subway line. It will stimulate the economy and tourism in Ontario. Not only that, but expanding transit creates thousands of sustainable jobs for the future and it will spark investment in the city. It will finally get people moving out of cars and onto public transit, and help the environment by reducing GHG emissions.

Now that we have the plan, to build it on time can be a challenge. Too often, Ontarians were disappointed and they started to lose faith in the hope we've given them. They realize there are many things that will hold up construction. Even when they see the shovels in the ground, it doesn't mean that it will be completed on time as they are hoping for.

Our government is not going to let that happen. We are committed to building the following:

- the Yonge North subway extension: five stations by 2029-30, a 7.4-kilometre extension of TTC's Line 1, the Yonge-University line, that will connect north from Finch station to Highway 7, connecting Toronto and Richmond Hill;

- the Ontario Line subway: 15 stations, 15.5 kilometres, as early as 2027. It will run between Exhibition Place and Ontario Place, through downtown Toronto, to the Ontario Science Centre. It will bring rapid transit to neighbourhoods such as Liberty Village and Flemingdon Park. It will help address dangerous overcrowding and provide needed relief to the TTC's Line 1 and Bloor-Yonge station;

- the Scarborough subway extension is three stations and eight kilometres. It will be completed by 2029-30. It is an extension to the TTC's Line 2, from existing Kennedy station northeast to McCowan Road and Sheppard Avenue; and

- the last one, the Eglinton Crosstown West extension is also one that has been waited for for a long time. With multiple stops along the Eglinton West corridor, it will be completed by 2030-31. The western extension of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT—future Line 5—will increase connectivity along Eglinton Avenue from the future Mount Dennis station to Renforth Drive. Ultimately, through the future phases of this project, the province is committed to establishing connectivity with Toronto Pearson International Airport as well. Wow.

0940

In order to achieve this, that is why we introduce the Building Transit Faster Act today. This legislation is about cutting the unnecessary red tape and redundant steps that hold up major transit projects. We have waited too long. We just have to keep our promise so that everything is on budget and on time and we'll not disappoint our people

here. It will give the province the tools needed for Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario to deliver the following priority transit projects faster within the committed time frames:

- Yonge North subway expansion, by 2029-30;
- Ontario Line, 15 stations, delivered by 2027;
- Scarborough subway extension, three stations, by 2029-30; and
- the Eglinton Crosstown West extension, by 2030-31.

The strategies the government is proposing to use to deliver the four subway projects are appreciated by a lot of Ontarians:

- modified environmental assessment process to reduce delays while maintaining strong environmental oversight;

- ability to enter lands for due diligence, removal of obstructions and encroachments, addressing imminent danger, and for monitoring compliance with corridor development permits;

- framework enhanced coordination of utility relocations;

- streamlined land assembly process;

- an approach to ensure timely access to municipal services and rights-of-way;

- establish a clear, agreed-upon process for ensuring building code compliance for transit infrastructure development; and

- requirement for owners of adjacent land and infrastructure to obtain a corridor development permit for construction and development activities that may interfere with subway construction.

As you can see, we are thorough enough to go through all the things that might hold back this plan that we have—the desire that our people want us to build the subway on time and on budget.

We are introducing this stand-alone piece of legislation that will, if passed, provide the tools needed to get our four priority subway projects built on time. These provisions will only apply to these projects. This proposed legislation will include:

- ability for the minister and persons accompanying to enter property for specified purposes, subject to notification and other requirements;

- provision for stronger coordination of utility relocations, within prescribed time frames;

- exemption of lands assembled for the four priority subway projects from the formal hearings process under the Expropriations Act;

- ability for the minister to issue an order outlining conditions under which Metrolinx could use or modify municipal assets, such as roadways and municipal services;

- provisions to require development and construction activities within a defined buffer zone of the subway corridor to obtain a permit in order to proceed, and enforcement authority;

- ability for the minister to issue an order outlining conditions under which Metrolinx could use, occupy or modify municipal assets, such as roadways and municipal services; and

—provisions to require certain development and construction activities within a defined buffer zone of the subway corridor to obtain a permit in order to proceed, and enforcement authority.

Accelerating transit delivery is part of our government's plan to build new transit faster, as people can get where they want to go when they want to get there.

Speaker, we've reached a pivotal moment in history when all three levels of government agree on one single unified plan to get the subway built. The previous Liberal government neglected transportation throughout Ontario, and as a result we have more and more gridlock. People have been screaming that we have aging infrastructure and overcrowded, outdated transit systems. It is clear that the current approach to build transit wasn't working. We needed to cut the unnecessary red tape and redundant steps that hold up major transit projects and to identify the roadblocks that cause the transit projects to be delayed, because delays are costly.

As mentioned earlier, as a result of congestion, we know that the GTA loses \$11 billion in productivity each year, adds \$400 million to the cost of goods, and has a detrimental impact on our environment as well. Our infrastructure lags behind other major cities, and taxpayers deserve better. So, in June 2018, the people of Ontario voted overwhelmingly for a government committed to getting the province moving, and we are doing just that. This is why we are taking all the actions to address the key challenges when building transit infrastructure to deliver a realistic, sustainable, integrated transit network that the greater Toronto area deserves.

I want to thank the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Caroline Mulroney, along with the Associate Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Kinga Surma, for bringing this act forward and for working tirelessly across the government as well as with the city of Toronto and Metrolinx to get transit built as quickly as possible. I want to thank PA Thanigasalam for working so hard in making all these things possible for all of us. I have already heard from many of my constituents in Richmond Hill, who really appreciate your hard work and our government's commitment to public transit on time and on budget.

Now let's hear from some of our industry partners on how they all agree and how excited they are. Jan De Silva, president and CEO of the Toronto Region Board of Trade, said: "Building transit more quickly is a key priority, not just for the business community but for residents as well. Clearing unnecessary roadblocks to ensure key transit projects are delivered on time and on budget is critical."

Phil Verster, president and CEO of Metrolinx, said: "We are committed to delivering transit as efficiently and effectively as possible so we can get more people moving sooner. It will be important to work closely with our city partners in order to minimize the disruption and inconvenience for residents along these lines."

I also have support from Anthony Primerano, director of government relations, LIUNA. He said: "LIUNA supports the accelerated transit proposal that will help

expedite the much-needed transit infrastructure on time, on schedule and on budget. Cost certainty is essential to create confidence in the market, which will translate into needed construction jobs for our workers."

We also have a comment from Mayor Frank Scarpitti, city of Markham. He said, "I am encouraged by the provincial government's move to streamline processes to build critical infrastructure and ensure priority transit projects like Yonge North subway extension are built on time, eliminating unnecessary and costly delays."

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Speaker, we did consult and we did hear from our constituents and all the great representatives across Ontario. May I invite everyone in this House to pass the bill as soon as possible and get our province moving faster.

To end, I would like to say one example from my own personal experience. Even coming downtown to attend Queen's Park, I have tried travelling from Richmond Hill every day. In the first couple of months, I got so disappointed. I cannot believe that it can take me as much as five hours to and from Richmond Hill in one day. There was one time it took me three hours, which, usually and easily, can take between 30 and 45 minutes, max. This is what we need in Richmond Hill.

I remember that time when I was late. I was three hours on the road and I was late for my committee meeting, which I thought I had allowed two hours and 15 minutes for. I was late by 45 minutes. How embarrassing. I can only imagine if it is for businesses to meet with a potential client; they will miss their contract.

What I did is I finally realized that it was getting into my sleeping hours. Five hours is sleeping hours that I need, so, finally, out of my own pocket, I paid for a place that I rent downtown. It's only 38 kilometres from Richmond Hill to Queen's Park; we need 50 kilometres to get our housing covered, but I would still rather pay it out of my own pocket to be on time for my commitments.

On time and on budget is so much required for anything that we do, not to mention the projects that we have put forward that everybody in Ontario is so excited about. We have waited long enough, and we really have to put the shovels in the ground. This act is really able to deliver that.

Thank you very much. I ask for the opposition and everybody to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Thank you for the comments on this bill. I don't know if there's a better example of the audacity of successive governments than the transit file in Toronto. Each government comes in and they have this brilliant new plan which is going to actually finally get things done, but part of that is ripping up the old plan, no matter how far along it had progressed, and the conversation is ended about all the progress that had been made on the previous relief line and all the work that had been done on the previous relief line. The government tears it up, moves on to the new one, and their plan is somehow better, stronger, faster and, hopefully, on budget.

You're gutting the environmental assessment part of this. You're pushing forward. Environmental assessments are meant to foresee unforeseen things, to account for all of that. What's going to happen when this government encounters things that would have been covered in the environmental assessment that they do not yet know about?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, member opposite. Yes, we have to build this faster and on budget. In June 2018, the people of Ontario voted overwhelmingly for a government committed to getting the province moving, which is why we are doing it as fast as we can.

We have reached a pivotal moment in history, when all three levels of government agree on the unified plan to get the subway built. Last fall, Toronto city council endorsed our subway plan with an overwhelming vote of 22 to 3, and, in addition, only one member of council voted against the motion to accelerate the delivery of transit expansion in Toronto. This will include working with municipalities to develop and facilitate the streamlined processes. In fact—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Questions?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. It's interesting. The member from Richmond Hill—thank you for that this morning—talks about how the Liberals didn't get anything done. Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that the individual who sat in my seat before was a Liberal cabinet minister for transportation? I'm going to look at my colleague from Kitchener Centre. Do you remember any progress in transportation during that time? No. Cambridge still does not have a GO train stop. We had a Minister of Transportation. This is something we heard a lot during the election. It's really disappointing that it never got done.

So I'm going to turn back to the member from Richmond Hill and just ask: You're coming from Richmond Hill. The commute is bad, as is mine. What kind of information and what kind of feedback do you hear from your constituents about this issue: transit congestion, traffic, things like that?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, member from Cambridge. Yes, like your constituents, my constituents in Richmond Hill have been asking me for this for a long time. In fact, the only one thing that everybody asked for when it was my election time was, "Make sure we have a subway back into Richmond Hill." When we got the announcement, they were all very, very excited because it will resolve the problem of travelling time into downtown.

Yes, they are very, very supportive, like your constituents.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Ian Arthur: Just to actually go back to my previous question—it was about environmental assessments and how they're supposed to foresee the unforeseen. They're complex, they're hard to do, and they're supposed to take into account aspects of a plan that might otherwise not be considered when pushing it forward.

I am honoured to stand in this Legislature and try to debate intelligently, to the best of my ability, on the issues of the day. So when I ask a question about environmental assessment and I am met by the member opposite with a line about how she had an unprecedented mandate to get things done and then to repeat talking points from a speech that was written by a 20-year-old comms person instead of actually addressing the question I asked, I wonder how the member feels that this honours her role in this Legislature as an MPP.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to the member from Kingston. In fact, we have really analyzed and assessed everything. Our minister and our PA have been working very hard every day, checking on everything before they get the people to move forward. We respect the environment and we respect all the assessments. We do have a team that is working together with us in moving this forward. What we have for the minister is so that they can work together in making sure they're on top of the schedule that we have so that we can deliver it on time and on budget.

Yes, we will respect the environment. We will respect all the assessments. Our minister, our associate minister and our PA have been working very, very hard to ensure that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Mr. Speaker, the member for Cambridge mentioned that the previous transportation minister was from Cambridge—a woman I recently went on a political blind date with, by the way. She didn't want to talk about the government's previous record.

But my question is to the member from Richmond Hill. You spoke eloquently and passionately about the need to address congestion in the city of Toronto. Of course, this particular bill addresses that: getting projects built faster. But not only will it have an impact on the people of Toronto—it really will; this will have an impact on people across Ontario. I'm wondering if maybe you could expand on how congestion in the GTHA impacts the rest of the province.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, member from Flamborough—Glanbrook. Yes, the congestion impacts everybody, not just in Richmond Hill and in the York region area, because we are expanding into the north, south, east and west. The congestion that we experience right now is holding everybody up. Even going to the airport sometimes is a struggle for many people, so the west Eglinton expansion is hope for that one day.

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So we're working toward that. We are answering the demands from the people. In fact, I was at the meeting the other day, and everybody was saying, "Yes, it's a good plan," for the transit plan, "but how can I really believe it? Even when the shovel is in the ground, it does not mean that it is done." But this act, especially this act, is going to do just that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to pursue a little bit more the questions that my colleague had asked about the environmental assessment process.

Given that three of the four lines that are specified in this legislation have already had the environmental assessment process completed, and given that the transportation EA process is already compressed, streamlined and short, I don't understand why this government feels that it's necessary to even further compromise environmental protections in this province and also suggest somehow that environmental assessment is the cause of the delay for moving forward with transit projects. I wonder if the member can respond to that.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, member opposite. Actually, we are not doing this on behalf of our environment. We have done a lot of things—there are examples of various tools and processes being used around the world to accelerate public infrastructure. We are not expediting just in the environmental area; we are making sure that all the red tape is being taken care of.

Trust me; we have been working with the environmental specialists to make sure that all the things that we need to care about will be worked on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have a very short period of time for a very short question and a very short answer.

Ms. Donna Skelly: To the member, maybe you could just expand a little on some of the comments you hear from your constituents about the need for faster-built transit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Richmond Hill has 28 seconds.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, member from Flam- borough–Glanbrook. Yes, from my constituents, they have been travelling—congestion is all in York region, not just around the Richmond Hill area. They find, just as I did, that they're having a hard time travelling to downtown and to around the east and west. They have been—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm looking forward to participating in this debate on Bill 171, the Building Transit Faster Act, as the first non-GTA member of the official opposition caucus. That's an important point, Speaker, because this legislation is specific to four GTA projects: the Ontario Line, the Scarborough subway extension, the Yonge North subway extension and the Eglinton Cross-town West extension.

In the context of the need for transit in this province and the need to move forward with a transit plan that is going to address the needs of all Ontarians, I think that certainly Torontonians deserve consideration of their transit needs, but so does the rest of the province, Speaker. You will know yourself, as a member of a southwestern Ontario riding, that last month we saw this government release a draft transportation plan for southwestern Ontario. That plan included 43 recommendations. I think this was a good start at opening up this discussion about what kinds of transit projects we need to see in our region. But the missing piece of that document was how to link southwestern Ontario's economy with the GTA. Certainly, people in southwestern Ontario immediately recognized

the shortcoming of this plan in supporting transit needs in our region.

I want to quote from an article in the Windsor Star that came out just after the launch of the plan. It states:

"The transportation plan that was first promised by the Tories last fall does little to draw the region closer into the Toronto area's commuter orbit.

"Toronto is in the throes of its own mobility issues, many of them from gridlock. But without a better system to lace southwestern Ontario to the mega-city, leaving only traditional ground and air transportation options, it appears the idea of living in this region and working in the GTA, or the other way around ... remains a non-starter."

Sarnia mayor Mike Bradley, who has been three decades in office and has seen transit plans come and go and change and get concreted over, noted, "The GTA connection is critical, it's absolutely critical for this region, and that's the part that I don't think is that strong in that report."

Speaker, we need to be having this discussion about transit in the GTA, but we also need to be looking much more broadly at the transit needs of other regions in this province. From my perspective as MPP for London West, London's transit needs are obviously a priority for me and for other MPPs who represent the London region.

Earlier this month, Statistics Canada released a report that acknowledged the London area as Canada's second-fastest growing region. That is significant because the growth that we are seeing in London is largely a result of people who can't afford housing in the GTA and are being pushed out into the Kitchener-Waterloo area, into London. They are keeping their jobs in the GTA, but they are locating in outlying communities because the housing is more affordable.

I'm not saying, Speaker, by any means that housing in London is the solution for people in this province. London, like everywhere else in Ontario, is struggling with a housing crisis. We have a vacancy rate of just 1.8%, which is the lowest it has been in almost two decades. We have seen rent increases going through the roof. Average rents are \$1,200 a month. Home prices are continuing to skyrocket. In January, we saw the average sale price increase almost 14% from the year prior. This housing affordability crisis is obviously a concern for Londoners. But in particular for Torontonians, who are facing even higher housing costs, to move to London seems to be one of the few options that they have available, but then they can't get transit to get back into the GTA, where they are employed.

The other pressure that we are experiencing in my community with regard to transit is how we get around within the city. In London, the city did an analysis of GHG emissions and found that London's greenhouse gas emissions related to transportation are much higher than the overall average for Ontario. So 55% of our greenhouse gas emissions are related to transportation. Within that, personal transportation accounts for about 30% of greenhouse gas emissions within our community, and about one third of those emissions are associated with in-town trips,

so trips that could be taken by bike or on transit, if there were convenient transit routes. But because we haven't had that support that we would have hoped for from successive Liberal and Conservative governments to enable us to expand our transit options and the operations of our transit options—in fact, we just saw this government cancel the planned doubling of the gas tax, which is a vital source of revenue for London to operate our transit systems.

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But because we haven't seen that support—again, we just saw an analysis that was released at the end of January of this year that said that London is one of the worst cities in Canada for time spent in traffic. In fact, that was looking at all cities in Canada, including the large mega-cities or very large urban metropolises. But when you actually look at small and mid-sized cities or cities with a population less than 800,000, London is the worst in Canada for the congestion that London drivers experience. Londoners see congestion on our roads 23% of the time. In Ontario, the next cities below London are Hamilton at 19% and Kitchener-Waterloo at 16%. Londoners want to do our part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and we want to use public transit, but we have to have a provincial partner who will work with the city to improve the transit services to people who live in London.

Within that context, Speaker, I now want to focus on some of the measures that are proposed in this bill to expedite transit projects in the GTA. As I mentioned, the bill is specific to four transit projects: the Ontario Line, the Scarborough subway, the Yonge North subway extension and the Eglinton Crosstown.

I just want to quickly highlight some of our major concerns. While we support expanding transit, and accelerating transit projects in a responsible way is something that we would be very interested in, we are concerned that the specific provisions that are set out in this bill will actually undermine transit planning and, in fact, may compromise environmental protection provisions and they may also undermine the rights of homeowners and businesses who are located along proposed transit routes.

This bill is predicated on the notion that the measures that are set out are simply backstops. It claims to be supportive of good-faith negotiations between the Minister of Transportation and local stakeholders such as municipalities, utilities, developers, property owners etc. The concern is that the powers that are given to the minister in this bill are not limited, so there is no guarantee that this will simply be a backstop. That is a major concern because of the extent of these new powers that the minister is given to quickly end disputes that could slow down the delivery of transit infrastructure.

Around this idea that it's disputes between the province and utilities or municipalities: I think we have to be clear, Speaker, that there's a big difference between disputes between the ministry and stakeholders and outright political meddling. Many of the members in my caucus have pointed out the issue of the Harris government filling in the hole that had been dug for the Eglinton subway and how that set transit back decades in Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. It is now 10:15, and I have to interrupt the member.
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms. Jessica Bell: Clinton's Tavern has been a neighbourhood institution for the past 83 years. It's a hub for concerts, trivia nights, choir meet-ups and other local events. This weekend, Clinton's Tavern closed its doors.

Clinton's closure is part of a larger trend. Across Toronto, local and independent businesses are struggling to survive. Some businesses have seen a 500% increase in their property taxes because of our highest-and-best-use policy, which means that some corner stores are being taxed as if they're a mythical 80-storey condo. Other businesses are being pushed out by sky-high rents because there's no rent control for commercial space, and then a big chain store moves in. We are seeing this trend in Kensington Market, Chinatown, Little Italy and Ossington.

Local stores, restaurants and music venues are more than just businesses. They make our community unique, they employ our neighbours and they keep our local economy strong. The closure of an institution like Clinton's is a big loss. As your MPP, I support the staff who are working so hard to keep Clinton's open, and as your MPP, I will continue to support measures that we can take here in Queen's Park to help local independent businesses in our city thrive.

ANDY'S HOUSE

Mr. Norman Miller: A few weeks ago, I had the honour of announcing provincial funding for three hospice beds at Andy's House in Port Carling. Andy's House has been 15 years in the making and will bring comfort to many patients, their families and caregivers.

This beautiful facility is named in honour of Andrew Potts, an OPP officer who was killed when his cruiser hit a moose in 2005. In 2006, Andy's father created the Andy Potts Memorial Foundation. In 2012, the Andy Potts Memorial Foundation partnered with Hospice Muskoka, and the two organizations have raised more than \$2.7 million from the community. In December, the district of Muskoka contributed \$200,000.

I want to thank all the donors and volunteers and, in particular, I want to recognize Brock Napier, who made a very large donation, and Officer Matt Hanes, who was Andy's partner. I also want to recognize Sandra Winspear, the executive director of Hospice Muskoka, and her team.

Construction on Andy's House started in 2018 and is almost complete. The rooms overlook the Indian River, and each room has a patio with a door wide enough to take the bed outside so the patients can enjoy the fresh air and beautiful view.

I want to thank Health Minister Christine Elliott for providing \$315,000 in annual funding to open and operate the first three hospice beds. Congratulations to all involved in making Andy's House a reality.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Jenny is a mom in Beaches–East York whose son, Henry, is a sunny, bright kid who loves to read. Quite suddenly, at eight years old, Henry developed serious mental health problems. He became aggressive, disruptive and even suicidal.

After a number of months, Jenny was able to get Henry psychiatric help, but he also needed help at school. He needed an educational assistant to help calm him when he was having an episode. The school had two EAs for 500 kids, but they were on constant duty, helping kids who were “runners” and in danger of leaving the school, and try as they might, the school was unable to get a third. So Henry's teacher coped with him by having his best friend walk him up and down the halls to help calm him down.

Jenny knows that Henry's condition worsened considerably over those months. At nine years old, he has now had to be hospitalized, but hospital mental health wards don't cater to children that young, and his care is far from ideal. Jenny wonders how much better Henry might have been doing had the school had the resources to help him when he most needed it. It is a question that haunts her; it is a question that should haunt this government.

Parents and teachers have shared story after story with me about schools trying to do too much with too little. How many Henrys are there who have been hurt—perhaps permanently—because schools can't cope? The Ford government needs to reverse the education cuts now.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm proud to rise today to applaud our government for its accomplishments in protecting what matters most, and that is our education system. Our government is investing in local schools and ensuring that students have the skills they need to succeed.

1020

In my city of Hamilton, approval has been given to proceed with the construction of two school additions in Stoney Creek. The \$8.6-million addition to Mount Albion school will provide new spaces for 230 elementary school students. Over 200 new spaces will be opened up for elementary students with a \$10-million addition at Collegiate school. The investments will also include new child care centres for 50 children, to serve Stoney Creek families. The Hamilton-Wentworth school board is contributing more than \$6 million to improve conditions at these schools.

Our government is protecting what matters most by working with local school boards to invest in capital projects that advance student learning. In addition, our government is investing up to \$1 billion to create up to 30,000 new child care spaces in Ontario over the next five years.

Over the next decade, millions and millions of dollars in capital grants will be dedicated by this government for new schools, additions and major renovations. We are providing school boards with an historic \$1.4 billion in funding to—

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

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Ms. Catherine Fife: This May, Waterloo region will welcome hundreds of athletes for the 2020 Special Olympics spring games. I'm so proud of the way our community has come together to prepare for the games. People have signed up to volunteer, and money is being raised to support athletes from across the province.

Waterloo Regional Police Service and Chief Bryan Larkin have gone above and beyond to support the upcoming games. The chief recently took the plunge at the second annual Polar Plunge. The event was hosted by Waterloo Regional Police Service and Wilfrid Laurier, with all proceeds going to support Special Olympics Ontario. The 112 plungers raised over \$45,000.

As the director of sponsorship and fundraising, local businessman Ron Caudle has also stepped up to support the spring games. This past Thursday, Ron received the community leader of the year award at the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards. Ron challenged us to put our compassion into action.

Ron and Bryan and so many others have stepped up, and you can, too. Every bit of support counts, so if you can, please volunteer or make a donation to Special Olympics Ontario. These athletes have so much to teach us. Let's show them that we are ready to learn and to support them on their journey.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

MOIS DE L'HISTOIRE DES NOIRS

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It is my pleasure to rise to recognize Black History Month, which is winding down.

The year 2020 marks the halfway point of the UN's International Decade for People of African Descent. The objective of the decade is that people of African descent in the diaspora would have full enjoyment in society, education, the economy, justice.

I had the pleasure of kicking off this year's Black History Month at the Ontario Black History Society's fundraising brunch. This year, their goal is to call for the preservation and maintenance of Black history and heritage sites in Ontario.

Part of this historic event was the unveiling of the Canada Post Black History Month commemorative stamp for 2020. It featured the Colored Hockey Championship. Like other aspects of Canadian society, historical racism extended into the realm of sport. In the Maritime provinces, Black churches hoped to use hockey to attract

young people to their organizations. From 1895 to the 1930s, about 400 players left their mark on the sport—including the creation of the slapshot.

This year also marks the milestone birthday of Canada and Jamaica's treasure, Ms. Louise Bennett, who made Canada her home.

The more we understand each other and respect each other's diversity, the more we can realize the promise of diversity.

Enfin, j'aimerais souhaiter de joyeuses célébrations du Mois de l'histoire des Noirs—

Le Président (L'hon. Ted Arnott): Merci beaucoup.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mrs. Robin Martin: Over the past few weeks, I've had the opportunity to speak with a number of small business owners across my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence about the challenges they are facing, and I heard one common theme: Their municipal property taxes, combined with rising property values in areas of transition, are making it difficult for them to survive.

In the city of Toronto, commercial property taxes are 3.8 times higher than taxes on residential properties. Some of the business owners I spoke with are now paying as much in property taxes as they are in rent.

For those on Eglinton Avenue, this is on top of the impacts they have been facing for many years due to the construction of the Crosstown LRT. Thankfully, the amount of construction at street level will be minimized in the coming months as remaining work goes underground.

Mr. Speaker, when our local restaurants, coffee shops, dry cleaners and convenience stores are unable to stay in business, it affects the entire neighbourhood. Empty storefronts discourage people from shopping local and are bad for business and community life.

To those businesses struggling, I assure you that we are listening. I will continue to work with our government to examine ways to provide municipalities with more tools and flexibility to address the concerns of local small businesses.

To everyone else, let's increase our efforts to shop local and make sure that our main streets stay open for business and are vibrant spaces in our communities.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, like most members in this assembly, we've been getting emails on a number of issues, but one of them, obviously, is from parents, teachers and students in regard to the government's agenda of doing cuts to education—namely, what's happening with increasing class sizes and also what's going on in regard to e-learning.

I have a letter from Natalie Poitras, who is with La Clef, which is a francophone organization that deals with alternative adult education in the city of Timmins. She writes a very long email but makes two very valid points. The first point is, first of all, they are mandated, as teachers

in the alternative ed programs, to offer e-learning to students. The experience is that when they offer the e-learning, kids have a harder time trying to complete those courses. When they offer them in the classroom with a teacher, attendance shoots up and there is a higher completion rate. We already know by our own experience that mandatory e-learning is not the answer.

The second thing that she talks about is larger class sizes. She works with children who have had all kinds of issues, and she lists what those are—everything from mental health to abuse; you name it. What she talks about is that these children often go through the school as invisible people and, as a result of having larger class sizes, they will become even more invisible to the system when it comes to offering them help.

Make sure we have teachers in the classroom to serve these kids.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Toby Barrett: Since my party formed government in June 2018, employment in Ontario has increased by 307,000 jobs. In fact, we're leading the nation, with 76% of our country's new jobs being created in Ontario.

The majority of these jobs are full-time jobs; they're private sector jobs. Unemployment is down and wages are up. Despite all this good news, we now know there's more work to be done. Only 1% of people on social assistance find jobs each month. This isn't good enough for me; it isn't good enough for our province's most vulnerable people.

That's why I'm delighted that our government is piloting a new approach to employment services, one that encourages local solutions for local job market problems. In our area, a group that includes organizations like Community Living was selected to manage our system. The principal proponent has over 85 years of experience in helping those with disabilities find work. Funding is tied to results, and I look forward to seeing the improvements they deliver.

Speaker, it's very important that we do everything that we can to help people find and also keep good, stable jobs.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Please stop the clock. I'm going to ask the members to quieten down a bit so that we can hear the member who has the floor with their statement.

Start the clock. The next member's statement?

MISSISSAUGA MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Mr. Kaled Rasheed: I rise today to highlight the tremendous work and community contributions of an organization close to my heart. Also known as MMC, the Mississauga Muslim Community's operating theme is "Neighbours Helping Neighbours." For many years, the MMC has been doing just that through an annual walkathon on Ontario's Family Day weekend.

I'm proud to say that since its inception in 2011 the walkathon has been raising funds for Trillium Health Partners' Credit Valley Hospital. So far, the MMC has raised \$250,000. Additionally, this year, the MMC annual Family Day Walkathon has pledged to raise another \$250,000, bringing the total to half a million dollars.

1030

The purpose of the walkathon, besides raising funds for charity, is to raise awareness and support families who may be facing challenges such as single parenthood, domestic violence, teenage pregnancies, youth crime, mental health challenges and addictions, and so on. The message of MMC is that we all need to stand up and work together, regardless of race, gender, culture or religion, to build and maintain a safe and happy home for all of our families.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I cannot find enough words to express my gratitude to MMC—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our member statements for this morning.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It is now time for introduction of visitors. I'll remind the members that we have five minutes for this. Introduce your guests by name, by riding, by organization, and keep it to that.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: It gives me great pleasure to welcome my constituent from London North Centre Wesam AbdElhamid Mohamed, whom I met with, from the Canadian Federation of Students. Wesam is also the VP of advocacy for the Society of Graduate Students at Western University. Welcome to the people's House.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I have the honour of introducing a great group of students from St. Dominic school in Oakville; their teacher, John MacPhail; and Kristin Courtney, founder of the Oakville Veterans Appreciation Luncheon. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to welcome our own page Irma Giselle Mendoza Saldana's family, from my great riding of York South-Weston. Here with us are her mother, Irma Ramirez; her dad, Oscar Mendoza; her sister, Larissa Mendoza; and her teacher, Daniela Faloma.

Also, I would like to welcome Jewish social services agencies who are here with us today. Welcome to your House.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I also want to tell everybody that today is the Jewish social service agencies advocacy day. They're sponsored by CIJA, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. There are too many personal names, although there are lots of wonderful people from my riding of Thornhill, so I'm just going to list the names of the organizations: the Bernard Betel Centre, Circle of Care, JACS Toronto, Jewish Family and Child services, JIAS Toronto, JVS Toronto, Reena, Jewish Family Services of Ottawa, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, Chai-Tikvah, Kayla's Children Centre, Hillel Lodge, Beth Tikvah

Hamilton, Shalom Village, Hamilton Jewish Family Services, and Kehilla. Thank you, and welcome to Queen's Park.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd also like to welcome CIJA social services—I had the pleasure of meeting with Toronto and Ottawa—and Hamilton Jewish Family Services. Welcome to Queen's Park.

And from the Ontario Autism Coalition, we have Michau van Speyk. Welcome back to Queen's Park.

Hon. Greg Rickford: All the way from Kakabeka Falls, my good friend Brandon Postuma is here today, and we welcome him to this magnificent House.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'd like to welcome Felipe Nagata from U of T Mississauga, Kayla Weiler from the Canadian Federation of Students, Christopher Yendt from Brock University in St. Catharines, and Sean Mitchell from U of Guelph. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. David Piccini: I'd like to welcome a constituent of mine, Chloe Craig, to the Legislature today. Thank you for your speech this morning. Welcome.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'd like to welcome the Ontario undergraduate students' association, the College Student Alliance, the council of universities and Colleges Ontario. Thank you for coming to Queen's Park to raise the issue of post-secondary mental health.

Mr. Stan Cho: Very quickly, I just want to welcome Barbara Stevens, my good friend, to the Legislature today.

Ms. Doly Begum: I would like to welcome Md. Abu Nasar, Fariduddin Ahmed, Khorsheda Begum, Monowara Begum, Md. Mubarak Mia, Md. Khalequzzaman, Delaware Sultana, Sabbir Bakhtiyar, Paral Malek, Shamima Nargis, Tahmina Akter, Md. Rabiul Islam, Sufia Begum, Bilkis Ara, Afsana Chowdhury and Ayesha Shirien. They're all from the seniors group at West Scarborough Neighbourhood centre. Welcome to your House.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I would like to welcome Jude Athanasyar and Anne Yarlina Athanasyar. They're the parents of page captain Jessica.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am delighted to welcome two constituents from London West: Lauren Goldsack, who is a member of my London West Youth Cabinet, and her father, Cory Goldsack. They have joined us today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Will Bouma: It gives me great pleasure to introduce to the House some municipal politicians from my riding of Brantford-Brant. From the county of Brant, we have Mayor David Bailey, Councillor John Peirce, and my friend and former seatmate John Wheat, whom my kids call "Papa John."

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It's my pleasure to welcome my dear friend Peter Landry, who is the provincial Liberal association president from Bay of Quinte. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Ross Romano: I would like to acknowledge some of our guests in the House today. Representatives from the College Student Alliance, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, Colleges Ontario and the Council of Ontario Universities are here today, working together to improve mental health services on post-

secondary campuses all across this province. Today, they have launched the In It Together report, which I encourage everyone to have the opportunity to—

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

Just to explain what we did this morning, there are five minutes. I tried to be systematic about it. I know most members would like to be acknowledged first when they stand up; some would expect to be acknowledged first when they stand up. I tried to start at both ends of the House and work my way down. Tomorrow, I'll start at that end of the House and work my way up. Okay? We'll see how that works. Thank you very much.

We were able to get everybody on because everybody adhered to the new standing order. Thank you for that, too.

QUESTION PERIOD

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is to the Premier.

It looks like another stressful week for students and parents. Yesterday, Catholic teachers ended negotiations, saying that they were frustrated by the Ford government's insults, attacks and lack of any proposals. Elementary teachers echoed these same concerns. Meanwhile, the Premier claimed parents are telling him, "Keep going. Do not back down."

As parents watch talks break down and classroom cuts take their toll, does he really expect us to believe that parents are sending the government messages of their support?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: I'm hearing that everywhere I go in the province. I guess I just don't hang out with the heads of the unions. That's what I don't do. I talk to the real people.

I'll tell you one thing: I'm not beholden, and neither is our party, to the heads of the unions. We're beholden to the teachers. We're beholden to the parents. We're beholden to the students. That's what we're focused on.

But I did talk to a single mom the other day. Her sick days and vacations expired. So guess what? On Friday, she never got a paycheque, because the unions decided to go on strike. It's time the unions put the students over politics and compensation, and work with the government to keep these kids in the classroom.

We're protecting full-day kindergarten, maintaining the smallest class sizes in Canada for early years. It's a fact: the smallest classroom sizes for early years. We're investing more in math and special education to make sure—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier should have been here on Friday to talk to 35,000 students, parents and

teachers, or any other place in the province where hundreds of thousands of folks were walking the picket line against this government's cuts to education.

On this side of the House, however, we thought that the Premier's claim was very unbelievable. In fact, we asked everyday Ontarians what they thought of it, and here's what they said. Kyle told us, "Parent here: big nope. Invest in education, pay public sector workers fairly, and build the province up instead of tearing it down." And Kim sent us a note that said this: "This parent strongly disagrees.... Our kids and our future economy need investments in education, not the harmful cuts this government is imposing. I support Ontario's educators."

Are Kyle and Kim wrong?

1040

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: As they had 35,000 people down here, there were hundreds of thousands of people in the back of factories who had to take time off who can't afford a day off. It's costing them personally; it's costing their families. It's tough enough to get ahead under the NDP and the Liberals, how they destroyed our province over the last 15 years.

We're listening to the parents and the students. We have reasonable bargaining at the table right now. We reduced class sizes from 28 down to 25. We reduced mandatory online learning from four to two courses. We're working day in and day out. I know that my champion—and he is a champion—Minister Lecce is at the bargaining table working hard to keep the kids in the classrooms.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I don't know why the Conservatives are having such a hard time with this, Speaker. Monique—not our Monique; another Monique—told us, "I haven't met a parent in the secondary system yet that said yes to bigger classes or e-learning!"

Fiona reached out to us to say that the Conservative spin was "funny, because anyone I talk to—parents, kids, teachers—are deeply worried about what's happening."

Again to the Premier: The Conservatives have called teachers fat cats. They've called them babies, and they've called them thugs. Don't they think it's finally time to spend a little less time name-calling and a little more time actually listening to what families really want?

Interjections.

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

Order. I recognize the Minister of Education to reply.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you, Speaker. It's time to get a deal in this province. That is why we went to the negotiating table yesterday to get that deal. We tabled reasonable, positive proposals that are good for students. Let me enumerate what those were.

We committed to keeping classroom sizes low. We committed to protecting full-day kindergarten in writing. We committed to a 100% investment in special education funding; in fact, providing more funding in special services.

In this negotiation, we committed to a fair 1% enhancement of compensation for education workers, whom we value, who are friends and our family. We're asking our union partners to work with the government to put students over union interests and rejoin our efforts to keep kids in class.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. Parents, students and teachers have been very clear. They see the cuts in their classrooms, teachers getting fired and a government that doesn't seem to have a strategy besides "do not back down." Does the Premier really think that's what parents want?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Parents want a deal that works for their students, not for the unions of this province. That's what we're advancing at the negotiating table each and every day.

Mr. Speaker, we went to the table yesterday to get a deal. We gave our negotiating team the ability to drive that outcome. Yet, even still, with a commitment to maintain full-day kindergarten, with a commitment to keep classroom sizes low, with a commitment to ensure a 100% investment in special education funding, more money in spec ed services, even still, compensation remains the true issue at that table: a benefit ask, an enhancement to benefits, when we know students need more supports for them, for their success and for their future prosperity. We're going to fight for students each and every day of this negotiation.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I want to share another note that we got from a parent named Catherine, who wrote us to say, "I'm ashamed and embarrassed that my Ontario government is behaving so selfishly and irrationally. It's time to stop behaving like middle-aged frat boys with a superiority complex...."

"Stop. Putting. Our. Children. Last."

Isn't it time to listen to everyday Ontarians like Catherine, or is this government going to continue to act like and pretend that they know best when it's obvious they don't?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We're going to continue to stand strong in the defence of student interests over union interests each and every day in the negotiating process, and parents expect that. They want the system to work for their kids.

We are spending more in education, a 60% net increase since 2003-04, and yet the question for parents, the question for every parent in this province, is: Do you see the comparable result? Do you see improvement from that investment?

The point for our government is that we expect better. We are committing in this negotiation to keep classroom sizes low, to ensure full-day kindergarten is protected in writing, to invest 100% more money in special education,

and yes, Speaker, we ask for consent by the unions for a 1% increase in compensation.

This is a fair deal for workers, but most importantly, it's a solid deal for students. It's time for the unions to work with the government, to get back to the table, to negotiate in good faith and get a deal that keeps kids in class.

Applause.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: No amount of accolades that this government gives itself is going to drown out the fact that the all-star Minister of Education and the Premier don't have a clue what everyday families—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. I need to be able to hear the member who has the floor, whether they're asking a question or whether they're responding. I apologize to the Leader of the Opposition.

Please start the clock, and I would ask her to place her question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks. I think we need a Zamboni driver to replace the Minister of Education here in the province of Ontario.

But look, the fact of the matter is, parents don't want classroom cuts. They don't want mandatory e-learning or larger class sizes. They don't want 10,000 teachers to be fired. And they don't want an education minister attacking teachers he's supposed to be getting a deal with. It doesn't work that way, Speaker. You don't poison the well and then expect to get a deal.

Will this Premier stop pretending that parents are on his side, stop pretending that educators are on his side, cancel the cuts, replace this minister even if it means with a Zamboni driver, and work on actually getting a deal done?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I find the cult of personality obsession by the Leader of the Opposition and the union presidents about me is really unhelpful. With respect to the Leader of the Opposition, it isn't about you. It isn't about me. It's about our kids, and it's about time you accepted that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Members take their seats.

Restart the clock.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: In the interests of our students, we're proposing a solid, positive deal for our kids. We're going to keep classroom sizes low. We're going to commit 100% investment in special education. We're going to maintain full-day kindergarten and we're going to offer a fair 1% enhancement to our workers. I want a deal. This caucus wants a deal. Let's get it done.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, the OPP arrested Tyendinga Mohawk land

defenders. I asked a question about what the Premier knew about the police action by the OPP and what role did he, his office or cabinet play. I'm not sure if I got the answer, so I ask again: Was the Premier briefed about the police action prior to the arrests and the dismantling of the protest camp at Wyman Road, and has the Premier or members of the cabinet been briefed since the arrests were made?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Indigenous Affairs to reply on behalf of the government.

Hon. Greg Rickford: To the member opposite, here is what we knew: We knew that it was important to be respectful, to support, encourage and facilitate Indigenous leadership to help address this situation. As time wore on, we protected the principles and the recommendations of Ipperwash. We don't provide instructions to the police. In stark contrast, we worked closely with people on the ground to ensure that we had a peaceful outcome.

We're satisfied that we went to the farthest lengths possible to achieve that end, and we hope that we can move forward, not just with Indigenous leadership, not just with the members of that community, but across this province to ensure that these kinds of events are handled more appropriately from all sides in the future.

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

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Mr. Speaker. We have to understand that these demonstrations are the result of 150 years. But instead, the Premier thought it was good to say, "Enough is enough. The illegal blockades must come down."

1050

Since the arrests yesterday, there are now more protests. The streets in front of Parliament Hill were shut down. The International Bridge in Sault Ste. Marie was shut down. Community members have shut down Highway 6 at Six Nations and the rail line at Hamilton.

Speaker, we're aware what the Ipperwash Inquiry concluded, and I hear a lot of words about dialogue with hereditary chiefs, hereditary leaders and respecting Indigenous law. So I ask: What has this government done, beyond these words?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Thank you for that. As a government, we've taken an across-the-ministry approach, a whole-of-government approach, to ensure that Indigenous people have their rightful place in just about every piece of legislation and policy option that this government is moving forward with. Take, for example, the Far North Act: a piece of legislation shoved down the throats of the isolated and remote northern communities by the previous government, absent any consultation. We are now working directly with them through the NAN leadership to ensure that decision-making moving forward is shared between the government and the Indigenous communities who—wait for it—actually live there.

I was in Thunder Bay just last week, announcing \$1.5 million to mobilize more than 300 people to work on the east-west tie. We went to the Anishinabek training centre there at the Thunder Bay library to ensure that there are resources to ensure Indigenous peoples, young peoples in

particular, are mobilized and ready for a new workforce, a new complexion of a workforce, all across northern Ontario.

I have a list here, Mr. Speaker. It's very long. Hopefully I'll get an opportunity—

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

MISSISSAUGA ECONOMY

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I'm proud to represent the great people of Mississauga and, in particular, my constituents of Mississauga East—Cooksville.

As we know, Mississauga is the sixth most populous municipality in all of Canada, generating \$55 billion per annum of economic output. Under the previous Liberal government, Mississauga was continuously taken for granted. Economic and business leaders have raised concerns about the policies put in place by the Liberal government, which prevented growth and made life harder for citizens.

Premier, can you please elaborate to the Legislature how Mississauga is turning around economically, thanks to our government?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank not just an all-star, but an all-star champion from Mississauga East—Cooksville.

Thanks to the policies of our government, Mississauga is booming economically like the rest of this great province. Mississauga was recently ranked the most business-friendly midsize city in the western hemisphere by the Foreign Direct Investment's American Cities of the Future report, out of 421 locations in North America and South America. That is an incredible feat. Mississauga also placed fourth in economic potential and third in cost-effectiveness and connectivity.

Mr. Speaker, our plan to build Ontario is working. Our economy is firing on all cylinders. Over 300,000 new jobs have been created in Ontario since we took office. That's 307,000 new opportunities. That's 307,000—

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

The supplementary question.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Back to the Premier: Premier, thank you for the support you are providing to the people of Mississauga and to the rest of Ontario. You are right: Mississauga is turning around once again. We are becoming stronger economically, with more people finding work and being able to provide for their families and loved ones.

The city of Mississauga's business community is made up of over 98,000 businesses, 1,400 multinational firms and 76 Fortune 500 companies. We are a major economic hub in this province, and our government wants to work with Mississauga and champion our entrepreneurs and business leaders. Premier, can you share more information about new economic investments and the companies who are now investing in Mississauga?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank our great MPP from Mississauga. Mr. Speaker, Mayor Crombie had a great stat

which she shared the other day: Mississauga creates 27 new jobs every day. That adds on to our 500 a day that we create across the province. This builds to the great news of Ontario's economic strength, new jobs being created. Think of this, Mr. Speaker: A new job is being created here in Ontario every three minutes. As we sit here, new jobs are being created.

Just this past December, Bombardier announced that Mississauga would be home to their new global manufacturing centre for its global business jet series. This is a massive investment of \$350 million. That is going to be high-paying jobs—hundreds and hundreds of high-paying jobs.

Another great company, Concentrix, is creating 300 new positions in Mississauga. They're opening up every single day—

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

LICENCE PLATES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. Premier, while your government is doubling down on the rollout of your partisan plates, the problems multiply. From durhamregion.com, Steven Kemp, Durham region's manager of traffic engineering and operations, flags that there is a problem with the design: "When it says 'Ontario' on the plates, it's very small. When the provincial officer looks at the image they can't always see 'Ontario.'"

Minister, you've blamed the manufacturer but then tell us they stand by the plates and that you stand by them, but the government House leader says they expect the company will foot the bill for the repair and replacement of the plates. It's really hard to keep up.

How did we get here? Who was responsible for testing? The minister said in an interview that this government did testing. She's never said anything about 3M's testing. Who was consulted during your government's exhaustive testing and where is the proof of any testing? Since they don't work in bright light, dim light, at a distance, in Durham and Toronto intersections or in the sun, will the minister please tell us, if you can: Where do the plates work and how can you back it up?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I want to be perfectly clear at this moment. I'm going to be very, very pointed when I say that we take the concerns of Ontarians very, very seriously. We're listening. We continue to listen, and we are taking action with our partners.

I am telling you, Speaker, I'm so appreciative of the fact that our partners are working around the clock to address what we've heard. Through this process, our government is working with and incorporating feedback from public safety stakeholders—our partners in terms of processing. I can assure you that 3M is working diligently alongside us to, again, address the concerns that have been shared. We are going to be rolling out and keeping

everyone updated on our progress in the days and weeks to come.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I hope that they'll reconsider and hand over the proof of that testing.

Speaker, this morning we read on WKBW Buffalo that on the US side of the Canadian border, "Supervisory CBP officer Michael Taylor said US Customs and Border Patrol is aware that some of the new Ontario licence plates cannot be read by the automatic licence plate readers at the border crossings." Taylor says wait times haven't been affected yet because there have only been a handful of plates at the border so far. Yet, Speaker, this government is still putting new plates on the roads. They are doggedly clinging to the hope that people will love these plates and maybe by extension love them.

Give us a real answer about how many white plates are still in stock that could be used. The minister says, "We're listening. We're hearing." But, Minister, people need you to be looking and seeing, so open your eyes. Will this government please stop wrecking things, stop scapegoating, be responsible and stop putting these unsafe, problematic partisan plates on our roads?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Most importantly, Speaker, we're doing. We're taking action and we're listening and consulting with the people who matter in terms of making sure that Ontarians have the type of plates that embrace technology, that take us into the 21st century.

We also need to ensure that people understand that their voice matters. Again, I can't stress enough, Speaker, that we are listening and we are taking action. And again, we're standing with 3M, who have assured us that they will deliver an enhanced product in the weeks to come.

Speaker, again, I look forward to continuing to update this House and the member opposite as our progress continues. We are taking action and we will be delivering an enhanced product in the coming weeks.

1100

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. It is the responsibility of this House and all members to raise matters of public interest and importance. It is our responsibility to seek to end injustice and to debate policies. But on Indigenous policy, we have been silent for far too long.

It is past time that we create a standing committee on Indigenous relations in this House, a standing committee where Indigenous peoples may be heard, policies examined and deliberated and solutions found.

Speaker, we cannot be silent any longer. I call upon the Premier to act and create a standing committee on Indigenous relations; for without honest, ongoing and respectful discussions from all sides, the mantra of reconciliation is empty and hollow.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Indigenous Affairs to reply.

Hon. Greg Rickford: I want to thank the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston for the motion he tabled this morning. I understand that it will be debated at second reading on March 5. I look forward to reviewing it in some detail and getting some reflections and input from all members of this place and, in particular, from my Indigenous critic on the content of what he's put forward.

I can say that this government at every turn, as I mentioned in a previous response, has taken the opportunities available to us to work directly with Indigenous communities on major policy positions and economic development. We continue to be hopeful that this relationship will be ongoing. We've had Indigenous leadership host proactive receptions here to build relationships, and we hope that, moving forward, we will continue to make all of these opportunities with Indigenous communities and leaderships a top priority with this government.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the Premier—and I appreciate the minister's response, but I believe the supplementary is deserving of a response from the Premier.

The people of Ontario expect their government to uphold the rule of law. They understand that there are inequities and strains in our relationship with Indigenous peoples. The conflation of facts and opinions that surround this relationship makes it difficult for everyone, native and non-native alike, to have honest discussions and debates.

I've asked today that the Premier create a standing committee on Indigenous relations. It is overdue. The committee must have the discretion to investigate related matters and report back to this House for open debate.

It is not my ballot day on March 5, Minister. We can do this by unanimous consent today.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Regardless of the specific date, I think the official opposition and the Indigenous critic would have some important things to say. There's a preamble here, as I look at the motion or the letter in its content. But some of the subject matter, I think, could and should be discussed.

Indigenous land claims: This government is moving at the fastest pace that I can recall in federal time and provincial to settle those land claims.

Indigenous impact benefit agreements: We've moved forward on a number of key legacy infrastructure opportunities with Indigenous communities all across northern Ontario.

The development of resources on native lands: The Ministry of Natural Resources, through the Far North Act, is dealing directly with Indigenous leadership.

Education and curriculum: We moved forward with reciprocal education policies and embedded Indigenous history mandatorily in the curriculums of elementary and secondary students.

These are all important subject matters, and we'll look—

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

Next question.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. David Piccini: When I got elected, I spoke to too many constituents who spoke of a broken employment system. In fact, the Auditor General reiterated this when she said that only 1% of people on social assistance were finding work each month. With one job being created every three minutes across the province, and with our province's largest chamber of commerce finding that 82% of businesses polled report having difficulty recruiting and finding new employees, my question to the minister is: Please explain how our government is making the system work better; and how are we supporting those people who are trying to navigate the employment system?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Thank you to the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South for that very important question.

Mr. Speaker, getting people into jobs is a top priority for everyone in this government. When job seekers have trouble finding work, while jobs go unfilled right across Ontario, it's clear that the system we inherited isn't working. It isn't working for employers who need workers or for workers who need a job.

We've engaged three different system managers to make the system work better. They will be funded on whether they actually help people find jobs.

Mr. Speaker, jobs are important. They put food on the table and a roof over families' heads. More so, having a job gives you a sense of dignity. We need to do everything possible to help people find good, stable jobs in Ontario.

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

Mr. David Piccini: Thank you, Minister, for that response. It's exciting to hear how the government is helping connect people, particularly our most vulnerable citizens, to jobs.

I think of my local constituent Jim, who spoke about how he struggled with navigating an employment system that separates Employment Ontario, ODSP and Ontario Works, often administering overlapping and conflicting programs.

Even as the government supports a competitive business environment and makes investments to help people prepare for jobs, the old system failed to help people find those jobs.

Could the minister please share more on how our government's changes will help workers across the province of Ontario, like my constituent Jim?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to thank the member for that supplementary question.

Mr. Speaker, helping people right across Ontario, in every single community, is why we're making this change. The system managers will find local solutions to local problems. Instead of being rewarded for failing while following processes laid out by Queen's Park bureaucrats, they'll be accountable for finding people work. The first communities to benefit from this will be Peel, Hamilton-Niagara, and Muskoka-Kawartha. Job seekers in each region will benefit from a one-window approach for ODSP and Ontario Works recipients.

We want everyone in Ontario to participate in the prosperity that's happening since Premier Ford got elected. Over 300,000 people are working today who weren't working 18 months ago. Wages are going up for the first time in a decade. And for the first time in 30 years, we have the lowest unemployment rate in Ontario.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Today, the Patient Ombudsman released their report. They received thousands of complaints pointing to one thing: The strain on our health care system continues to grow, after years of cuts by the Liberal government. But instead of fixing the Liberals' mess that left us with a hallway medicine crisis, ballooning wait times for long-term care and a shortage of qualified personal support workers, this government has cut more from the health care budget, ignored the needs of the front lines and prioritized the reorganization of the health care system above all else.

Ontarians tell us that we need more investments in health care, not cuts.

Premier, will your government listen and provide the necessary health care investments in the upcoming budget?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question.

I am very familiar with the work done by the Patient Ombudsman. I thank them for their report and I look forward to reviewing the details of it. The work that they are doing is really important for the people of Ontario. However, it is my hope that over time, with the new local Ontario health teams coming into play, they will be able to rectify a number of the concerns that have been relayed by the Patient Ombudsman's report recently.

We are actually increasing investment in health care services in Ontario considerably, by \$1.9 billion this year over last year. This is a huge increase in volume—and it's not just the amount of money that's being invested; it's where the money is being invested. We want the money to go to front-line services. That's what the people of Ontario have told us over and over again.

The transformation that we are working on right now with the local Ontario health teams, where those teams plan and provide the services and fill in the gaps that have been identified by the Patient Ombudsman, is going to result in high-quality—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: This Conservative government moves fast when it wants to, like when they released their vanity licence plates that can't be read. But the Conservative government is missing in action when it comes to helping everyday Ontarians; for example, when they seek help to care for their elderly parents, like my constituent 87-year-old Bertha, who refuses to leave her long-term-

care room, who refuses to eat, because she misses her husband, Rhéal, 89 years old, across town away from her in a different long-term-care home—unable to reunite them for the last 13 months.

1110

They are missing in action when people need help to pay for their medication. The Ombudsman's report also pointed out that not too many people even know that they can seek help from the Patient Ombudsman. Perhaps that's because the position has been vacant for nearly two years.

Why has the Premier taken so long to even start the search for a new Ombudsman for our health care system in crisis?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, the Patient Ombudsman is a very important position. The search has started. There is an independent group that is taking a look to select the right person to be the next Patient Ombudsman. However, the work in that office continues. There's no slowing down of the work that they are doing.

In terms of what we are doing in the Ministry of Health, I can tell you that we are taking swift action. We have talked to thousands of people across Ontario. We know that there are concerns that people, when they are leaving hospital and need home care, aren't necessarily getting the services that they need. They often don't know who will be coming to provide the home care, when they will be coming, or who's providing the service. That is changing with the new local Ontario health teams. People will know before they leave the hospital who they will be connected to for home care and they will be followed for that to make sure that there aren't complications that are going to bring them back into hospital again.

We are taking action on primary care. We're also taking action on mental health and addictions care. Our plan will be released very—

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

PHARMACARE

Mr. Michael Coteau: Premier, when you announced that OHIP+ would no longer cover medication for those who had private insurance, you reassured families and their children that any additional costs not covered because of those changes would be covered.

Recently, a family from Oakville contacted my office and shared their story on how they are now forced to pay nearly \$500 per month for a required prescription of nutritional formula for an autistic child. While OHIP+ used to cover this, they are no longer eligible because of their private insurance.

To the Premier: Why is this family forced to pay nearly \$500 a month when your government promised Ontarians that the changes to OHIP+ would not result in a loss of coverage?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: OHIP+ does cover virtually all of the costs that people will incur. If people are not able to

pay any additional costs, of course there's always the Trillium program that they can apply to. That is what we promised the people of Ontario. We don't want people who don't have insurance coverage to have to pay those additional costs.

We would be happy to take a look at that particular circumstance, because we are aware of several areas that people were concerned about where we have provided coverage. In this particular case, I'd be happy to speak to you about it to make sure that we are able to provide that person with coverage if they're not able to pay for it themselves.

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: We actually did reach out to your office, because I thought maybe something was overlooked; maybe there was a mistake that was made. The answer that came back from your office was a big no.

These cuts are part of a bigger pattern that has taken place here in the province of Ontario over the last 20 months, where we've seen cuts to after-school programs, teachers, libraries, autism services, complex special needs—even cuts to children's breakfast programs.

Premier, you made a promise to Ontarians that they would not lose coverage. You made that promise that they would not lose coverage with OHIP+. If that was true, why is this family now forced to pay almost \$6,000 a year for a prescription that is necessary for the health and well-being of this child?

Speaker, the Premier made a promise to Ontarians. Will his government reconsider these cuts to OHIP+ so that this family and many others will have coverage restored?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Again, without understanding the particular circumstances of the person that you're describing here, I can't make a comment on that. I would be happy to discuss it with you afterwards.

What I can tell you is that we want to provide more front-line coverage to people, more services for people and more prescriptions for people. That's one of the issues that we need to discuss with the federal government, quite frankly, more prescriptions rather than a pan-Canadian pharmaceutical program.

Let's talk about the issues that are really a concern for governments across this country, which are rare and orphan disease drugs. Those are the things that we are finding it increasingly difficult to cover. It's wonderful that these drugs are being discovered, but they are incredibly expensive. That is a good point of discussion for us with the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley East, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Energy, come to order.

I apologize to the Minister of Health for interrupting her. She can conclude her response.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much, Speaker.

In conclusion, the issue of rare and orphan disease drugs and other drugs that might not be covered under the provincial program right now will be discussed with the federal minister. That is a good point of discussion for the provincial-territorial ministers with the federal government when we have our first meeting, which should be coming up within the next month or so. We need to start talking about the things that are really an issue for provincial governments, and I know from my colleagues that that's certainly one of them, and something that I certainly intend to present when we do have that meeting.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question? The member for Burlington.

Ms. Jane McKenna: My question is for the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley East, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Don Valley East is warned.

Once again, I'll explain what we do with warnings. If I have to speak to the member again after the member has been warned, he will be named without further warning.

Please start the clock. I apologize to the member for Burlington.

DEATH REGISTRATION

Ms. Jane McKenna: My question is for the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. The Babcock family saw first-hand how a lengthy and exhausting legal process to obtain a death certificate can make an already devastating life event even more challenging. In July 2017, an Ontario jury heard sufficient evidence to find that Laura Babcock had been murdered even though her remains had not been found. Although a court convicted two individuals of Ms. Babcock's murder, her family faced many challenges registering her death because her body was not found.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please tell us more about the Babcock family's advocacy work that spurred changes to how the province facilitates death registrations in cases where a person disappears in circumstances of peril and no remains are recovered?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I want to thank the member from Burlington for asking this important question because, again, it demonstrates how our government is listening and taking action.

I'd also like to share my appreciation with the Babcock family. You have been amazing advocates, leading with your heart, to ensure that no other Ontario family experiences what your family went through.

Bureaucratic barriers made the grieving process for the Babcock family more difficult than it really needed to be. So Laura's parents wrote to our government asking that something needed to be done, and asked that Ontario families have an easier path to take when they find themselves in very unthinkable, unfortunate situations.

So I'm pleased to share with you, Speaker, that my ministry worked alongside the Office of the Attorney General to introduce changes that have made the death registration process less burdensome and more compassionate.

I want to thank the Premier. I want to thank the member from Etobicoke Centre. I want to thank—

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

The supplementary question?

Ms. Jane McKenna: Mr. Speaker, the situation that the Babcock family went through is heartbreaking. Can the Attorney General tell us about the steps our government has taken to ensure that no other family in the Babcock's position will have to endure a lengthy and complicated course of action in order to complete the death registration process?

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

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you to the member from Burlington for the opportunity. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the Babcock family for raising this issue with our government.

Our government has made changes to the Vital Statistics Act that amend the death registration process to ease the burden for families faced with registering the death of a loved one in the absence of their remains. Laura's Law, as we have named it in honour of Laura Babcock, would provide a simpler method for families to obtain a death certificate in tragic circumstances. This change will provide tools to the courts, in particular crown attorneys and judges, to facilitate the registration of death in these cases and ensure that families have the necessary support.

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Laura's Law will ensure that in the future the death registration process is less burdensome for families who experience a similar unthinkable tragedy. Mr. Speaker, the coordination between ministries and the leadership of the Premier was critical in making this happen.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is for the Premier. Steven Graci, a resident in my riding of Humber River–Black Creek, saw his auto insurance premium jump by 20% just before Christmas, despite having a clean driving record. It turns out that Steven is not alone, because both the Liberal government that was here just earlier and the current Conservative government have allowed auto insurance premiums to go up nine consecutive times.

Since the Premier campaigned on lowering auto insurance rates, can he tell Steven and the rest of us why our auto insurance rates are continuing to go up, just like the Liberals did before them?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Finance, to respond on behalf of the government.

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member for his question. Yes, dealing with the auto insurance rate issue

has been an issue that has been a top priority for this government. Mr. Speaker, you'll remember that the new blueprint that was released in our June 2019 budget addressed in a very systematic and appropriate way the things that will lower costs, like increasing competition so that we have the best products for drivers and making sure that consumers have choice in terms of the products that they can choose from and that they can make decisions that make sense for them.

We've launched FSRA, the new regulator coming in, which is working with the insurance industry, working with advocates, working with the assessment industry, working with the trial lawyers, but most importantly working with drivers to make sure that the products offered offer a choice for consumers. That will be the key to addressing this rate problem, and we'll have more to say about that in the weeks and months to come.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Speaker, I submit that their auto insurance blueprint is the same shade of blue as the licence plates: It's nonexistent; we can't see it. But thanks again.

Dr. Fred Lazar, an economist from the Schulich School of Business, recently released a report which found that Ontario drivers may have overpaid on auto insurance by at least \$5.6 billion between 2011 and 2018. Yet the most recent Ontario Road Safety Annual Report revealed—and this is important—that the number of injuries on Ontario roadways was at their second-lowest since 1964. In fact, for the last 18 years, Ontario has had the fewest road fatalities in all of North America.

Something is not right when Ontario drivers are among the safest in North America but are paying the highest auto insurance rates. I guess that's just Tory math. Can the Premier tell us why he is continuing the failed Liberal legacy of gouging Ontario's drivers?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to provide a little bit more background for the member, who might not remember that it was the NDP government that brought in the no-fault program that still chose to include—interestingly, Mr. Lazar, of course, is working for the trial lawyers, who continue to work under the tort system within that failed system. That was the beginning of almost two decades of a failed approach, an approach that we are correcting by making sure, as I said, that we offer consumers more choice, that we understand the balance between the important rights of victims but also the need to make sure that a no-fault system works.

Mr. Speaker, that's what the blueprint lays out, and we'll be continuing to make progress on that, offering choice for consumers, making sure that there's competition within the insurance market, making sure that the assessment system—again, a legacy of that failed no-fault system—is corrected so that drivers can be treated fairly and that we put drivers first.

HOME CARE

Mr. Parm Gill: My question is for the Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, this government is taking hallway

health care seriously. We are getting our hospitals the resources they need, like this year's \$384-million increase in funding. Our government also invested \$68 million in small, medium and multi-site hospitals to start addressing the previous government's inadequate funding formula.

Patients need more options to receive the care they need. One such option is home care, where patients are well enough to leave the hospital but still need assistance with some day-to-day tasks. Can the minister tell this House about the issues some patients are currently facing?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member from Milton for your question. Currently, those seeking home care can face multiple assessments and long waits. That's why our government plans to bring an outdated system, designed in the 1990s, into the 21st century, by integrating home care with the rest of the health care system.

It's clear that we need home care to help us end hallway health care. One reason the home and community care system is not meeting our needs is because outdated, rigid legislation is creating needless barriers to care and stifling innovation. We need to take action. Right now, far too many patients fall through the cracks or are left trying to navigate the system on their own. Our government's approach will put patients first and help them to get the connected and responsive home care that they need.

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

Mr. Parm Gill: Thank you, Minister, for your work on this file. I'm happy to hear that our government recognizes these issues and that we're taking action.

Understanding these issues with coordination and the currently very restrictive legislative framework, it is clear that a new approach is needed. We have consulted across many sectors to find innovative solutions for other issues facing our health care system, and home care is no different. Can the minister tell this House more about our plans for the future of home care and how to improve the system so that these long-standing problems are finally resolved?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you again to the member for your question. We want our home care system to provide the best possible care to anyone in Ontario who needs it. We intend to take action on a number of fronts, including the launch of the local Ontario health teams, to aid in the coordination of care. Our government will seek to make targeted financial investments and modernize the procurement process. We also know that we have to address human resource shortages in the home care sector by making sure our personal support workers are able to make the best possible use of their time and their skills.

Our government will continue to advance effective solutions to the issues facing our home care sector right now. I look forward to providing more details on the changes to our home care system later today.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is to the Premier. Premier, I'd like to tell you about one of my constituents,

Gordon MacDonald. Gordon is a senior living in Kitchener who has been driving since he was 16 years old. He is a good driver and doesn't have any driving offences. He was shocked when he went to renew his auto insurance this year, and his insurer wanted to increase his rates by 21%. That's hundreds of extra dollars a year Gordon will have to pay out of pocket for auto insurance, even though Ontario already has the highest rates in the country.

Does the Premier think it's acceptable that Gordon is seeing his auto insurance rates go up by 21% in one year?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Finance to reply on behalf of the government.

Hon. Rod Phillips: Rising auto insurance rates are an issue for people in Ontario, and that's why this government has put forward a blueprint, a plan, to address them. The origins of that issue are the failed policies of the former New Democratic government. When your failed approach to no-fault insurance—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Rod Phillips: And it goes back that far, when their policies failed to address some of the systemic issues, followed on by the previous Liberal government, who, time and again, cut benefits and tried to solve the system on the back of individuals who were injured.

Our plan is a plan that will work. Our plan is a plan that focuses on increasing competition within the sector, increasing choice for drivers, so that we can deal with the issues like the member has addressed. But this is a problem that has its origins, yes, decades ago, and it's a problem that we're going to fix with a plan that focuses on drivers and what's right for drivers.

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Back to the Premier: The province approves all auto insurance rate increases. The government has the ability to keep rates from going up, but chooses not to. In fact, this Conservative government just approved a rate increase as high as 11% for this year, despite campaigning on a promise to lower auto insurance rates.

1130

Ontarians have seen this before. When the Liberals promised to reduce auto insurance rates by 15% and failed, they turned around and called it a stretch goal. Why is this Conservative government continuing the Liberals' disastrous record on auto insurance?

Hon. Rod Phillips: This government is focused on fixing this problem. This government is focused on making sure that our plan deals with the systemic problems by making sure that we have more competition in our market and more choice for drivers.

But let's talk about the suggestions that have been made by the opposition—the suggestions, for instance, made by the member from Brampton East. These are suggestions—not unlike suggestions that we intervene with an independent regulator, which I'm sure isn't what the member was suggesting—that would have increased rates, because they aren't thoughtful about the problem.

We will address auto insurance rates. We'll address it with a plan that makes sense, and we'll address it with a plan that's sustainable, not like the previous Liberal government, that said they were going to fix the problem and rates kept going up, and not like the NDP, that created the foundation of the problem system that we have today.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. As was mentioned yesterday, it's Invasive Species Awareness Week across the province. Many of us have in fact encountered problems with invasive species in our ridings. Invasive species pose a significant threat to Ontario's biodiversity, recreational activities and tourism.

Can the minister inform us of what the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is doing to tackle the problem?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the great member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington for that question. This is Invasive Species Awareness Week, and I'd like to update the House on what we're doing.

Our government is committed to protecting Ontario's environment for future generations. We recognize that the most important thing, when it comes to invasive species, is prevention. That's why, earlier this month, we proposed to add 13 new species to the invasive species list. By adding these species, my ministry will be able to develop prevention and response plans so that quick action can be taken to control and manage threats as they arise.

Last year alone, our government invested over \$2 million in invasive species programs and education. These funds go to support ongoing research, monitoring and management of invasive species across the province.

I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Mr. Speaker, it's great to see what smart, pragmatic work our government is doing to protect and conserve our environment. Initiatives like this are an example of the way in which we are working to make changes that are good for the environment, good for our communities and good for our economy.

I noticed that wild pigs are among the list of species under consideration. I know that we don't have a major wild pig problem in Ontario, but again, our government is not taking the risk this species poses lightly.

Could the minister please tell the members of this House what measures we are already taking to prevent a wild pig population from establishing in our province?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thanks again to the member for that very important question. As I mentioned earlier, prevention is the key when dealing with invasive species. Since the fall of 2018, we've been asking the public to report wild pig sightings. This plays a critical role in understanding the locations and number of wild pigs in the province, and will inform future action.

Earlier this year, my ministry launched a pilot project, which includes on-the-ground follow-up in areas where reports suggest there is a high likelihood that wild pigs are present. At these locations, ministry staff are actively engaging with landowners to learn as much as possible, and using trail cameras to confirm these reports.

By adding to the list of invasive species, my ministry has further tools at its disposal to regulate, prevent and respond as threats emerge.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier. The government's Employment Ontario and OW and ODSP employment services pilot program has the providers extremely concerned about the quality of services and potential job losses. In Hamilton-Niagara a foreign-owned company will take over, and in Peel a foreign for-profit company will be responsible for employment services. No municipal partners were selected, causing AMO to raise their concerns.

Because of the pilot, the city of Brantford is preparing to lay off staff. To add insult to injury, we know that similar privatization programs in Australia and the UK did not work. In Australia, for-profit employment programs were described by their own Senate as being "not welfare to work" but "welfare to nowhere."

Did the government consider the local job losses and failed privatization programs in Australia and the UK before choosing the Hamilton-Niagara and Peel providers?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. My top priority, the government's top priority, is to help people find jobs in Ontario. It's clear that when it comes to unemployment in the province, we've got to get this right and do a better job.

Back in 2016, the Auditor General made that very clear. She said that the system clearly isn't working. One of the major statistics that I find unacceptable—and I question why the opposition would defend it—is the fact that every single month, only 1% of people who are on ODSP and OW are getting off those systems, at a time when 200,000 jobs are going unfilled every single day.

We're not going to defend the status quo. We need change when it comes to employment services in the province. But we're going to continue to help people put—

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

The supplementary question? The member for Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Premier: Employment Ontario, ODSP and OW are not sufficiently supporting the people who rely on those services, but the solution isn't to just sell them off to foreign companies at the expense of taxpayers and vulnerable people. These companies will push people into precarious low-wage jobs because their

bottom line is profit, not people. They get paid when a job match is made, even if it's an inappropriate match.

Fedcap, the new Hamilton-Niagara provider, was investigated by the US Department of Labour in 2018 for failing to properly pay their employees, shorting benefits and illegally deducting fees from paycheques. They were ordered to pay almost \$3 million to 440 employees in 17 workplaces. They swindled their own employees, and this Conservative government has put them in charge of finding jobs for vulnerable people in our province.

Will the Premier admit that this is yet another ill-conceived, costly mistake from his Conservative government?

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Labour to reply.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Mr. Speaker, let me again be very clear that the Auditor General highlighted what has been happening for 15 years in this province. Every single month in the province, there are one million people on ODSP and OW, and only 1% of them are finding a meaningful job. We have to improve the system for these people.

Unlike the current system, the three successful proponents will actually receive funding based on their results. It will be a performance-based system.

The Auditor General told us that the current system is failing these unemployed people in the province. She also highlighted that 40 providers missed their targets and only four of those providers actually had their funding reduced.

Mr. Speaker, this is a system that was defended by the NDP and by the former government for decades. It's clearly failed our most vulnerable. We want everyone in Ontario to share in the prosperity that's happening—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes our question—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

That concludes our question period this morning. This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1500.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated February 25, 2020, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 111(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

DITCH THE SWITCH ACT, 2020 LOI DE 2020 POUR REMETTRE LES PENDULES À L'HEURE

Mr. Paul Miller moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 174, An Act to amend the Time Act / Projet de loi 174, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'heure légale.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member care to take the time to explain his bill?

Mr. Paul Miller: This bill amends the Time Act to make the time now called daylight saving time the standard time year-round.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE ACT, 2020 LOI DE 2020 POUR CONNECTER LA POPULATION AUX SERVICES DE SOINS À DOMICILE ET EN MILIEU COMMUNAUTAIRE

Ms. Elliott moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to amend and repeal various Acts respecting home care and community services / Projet de loi 175, Loi modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les services de soins à domicile et en milieu communautaire.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd invite the Deputy Premier to explain her bill, if she chooses to do so.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I will speak to the bill during ministerial statements.

MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 SUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE MATERNELLE

Ms. Karpoche moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 176, An Act to proclaim Maternal Mental Health Day and to require a review of maternal mental health in Ontario and the preparation of a Provincial Framework and Action Plan / Projet de loi 176, Loi proclamant le Jour de la santé mentale maternelle et exigeant un examen des enjeux de la santé mentale maternelle en Ontario et l'élaboration d'un cadre et plan d'action provincial.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member like to explain her bill?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: As members will recall, I gave a statement last fall on maternal mental health, and the response to that statement was overwhelmingly positive. I received a flood of messages from fellow moms and moms-to-be who shared their experience of struggling with postpartum depression in silence, stigma and a lack of community-based supports.

Maternal mental health issues are common. They touch one in five new moms and yet go undiagnosed and untreated for so many.

Ontario does not have a coordinated plan or strategy to tackle postpartum depression and to promote maternal mental health.

This bill is inspired by all the moms in this province asking for help and, frankly, who deserve better. I'm here to push the government to take action on maternal mental health.

The bill proclaims the first Wednesday of May in each year as Maternal Mental Health Day, to raise awareness of the issue. To bring concrete solutions to improve maternal mental health, this bill requires the Minister of Health to conduct a comprehensive review of maternal mental health in Ontario, and to prepare a provincial framework and action plan on this issue.

Speaker, this bill is dedicated to all the moms in the world.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE

Hon. Christine Elliott: Today, it is my pleasure to introduce the Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, 2020, which, if passed, would build a modern and nimble system to deliver home and community care services, bringing this outdated system designed in the early 1990s into the 21st century.

Home and community care is a critical part of our government's plan to end hallway health care, and one of the ways we are building healthier communities by ensuring that patients can receive the right care in the right place, including their homes.

Many Ontarians rely on these critical services. Last year, more than 700,000 people received home care services, and 600,000 people received services such as Meals on Wheels and client transportation.

The reasonable approach we are proposing would remove long-standing and outdated barriers created 25 years ago under a different system during a different time.

If this proposed legislation should pass, patient care would be better coordinated because health care providers would be empowered to work together with a full picture of the patient's needs, while still operating under strong oversight and accountability. This is personalized, integrated care in action.

This new approach would expand access to services while removing barriers, to ensure that the coordination

among those services is seamless. Patients will receive the home and community care services they need as quickly and conveniently as possible, without having to tell their personal story over and over again, because our proposal will transition home care out of administrative silos and into Ontario health teams in a measured and responsible manner.

Speaker, our government has begun to support the launch of Ontario health teams in several communities across the province, and we hope to announce many more next year. If this proposed legislation should pass, these Ontario health teams would, over time, be able to deliver home and community care services that better meet the needs of Ontarians.

Ontario health teams will be responsible for understanding a patient's full health care history, directly connecting them to all of the services that they need, and helping patients navigate the health care system 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Patients will benefit from more flexible, responsive care that recognizes that a one-size-fits-all approach is not the best way to meet their individual needs, as primary care, hospital care, home care service providers and long-term-care organizations would be able to collaborate directly.

It will also recognize that patients need support every day, around the clock, not just during normal office hours.

If the bill before us passes, patients will be able to access better integrated care in all the places they go for care. The transitions between types of care will be smoother. And more patients will be where they want to be—for example, at home rather than in hospital.

One thing that would not change is that if you qualify, the Ontario government will continue to pay for a wide range of your home and community care services.

We will also maintain several elements of the existing framework, including restrictions limiting the delivery of community services to non-profits; requirements for a complaints process, and the right to appeal certain decisions to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board; inclusion of home care in the jurisdiction of the Patient Ombudsman; and the bill of rights for home and community care.

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If this proposed legislation passes, we will begin to transition home and community care services to Ontario health teams in a deliberate and measured implementation over time and as they are ready, to protect the ongoing provision of care for patients.

Speaker, to ensure ongoing stability of these vital home and community care services for patients, the province will create home and community care support services, an interim and transitional organization with a singular focus on overseeing delivery of home and community care, as well as long-term-care home placement.

With the proposed creation of home and community care support services, Ontario is winding down local health integration networks in a phased way that supports continuity of patient care. A single board of directors for

these organizations would keep a strong watch on the delivery of care across the province, and would be held accountable by the Ministry of Health.

I do want to stress, Speaker, that throughout this proposed process, patients and caregivers will continue to access home and community care services in the same ways that they always have, using the same contacts.

Our government firmly believes that, should this proposed legislation pass, the care that patients and families rely on every single day will not be interrupted or compromised. This is our top priority, and one that will inform every step that we will take along the way.

Thank you very much, Speaker, for the time.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you to the minister for the Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, and the ministerial statement on it.

Does home care need to be reformed? Absolutely, Speaker. Our home care system fails more people than it helps, every single day. We are at the end of the fiscal period that will end on March 31. Right now, it doesn't matter where you score on your needs base; it doesn't matter that you would need help every single day to get out of bed, to get dressed, to get fed, to be respected in your home. If you live in my community, the only thing you will get is two baths a week. That's it. That's all. Why? Because the LHINs, who control the funds, don't have any money left for home care.

Our home care system is broken. How do we fix it? Well, in part, by making PSWs—those are the majority of the workers in our home care system—by making PSW jobs good jobs. Right now, most of the contract providers—because home care has been privatized, the LHINs issue contracts, and private care providers get those contracts, and then they arrange for care, often subcontracted care, to go to your house.

Right now in Nickel Belt, and in huge parts of Sudbury, you cannot find a PSW to work for any of those home care firms. Why? Because when you do get to work for home care—lots of very well-trained, skilled, very good PSWs choose to leave home care, because it doesn't matter how hard they work; it doesn't matter if they get up at 5 a.m. and travel all over Nickel Belt until 9 o'clock at night. They will not make a living wage, because they work part-time; because they're paid barely over minimum wage; because they have no benefits; because they have no pension plans; because they have minimum reimbursement for the time and the mileage they spend between homes. In Nickel Belt, they will bring their list to me, and it's 750 kilometres. Well, 750 kilometres in Nickel Belt in the middle of the winter will take you many hours to do. They don't get paid for any of this. They get their 32 cents a kilometre. That's it. That's all.

So, should we fix home care? Yes, absolutely, we should fix home care. But start with the glaring problem with home care: recruiting and retaining a stable workforce. Continuity of caregiver brings continuity of care which brings quality of care. None of this is in the bill. Will we see some changes? Yes. Right now, all the care coordinators are within the LHINs.

But do you know what care coordinators have been doing, really? They have been rationalizing care. They have been looking at the few dollars that they have and not saying, "What is it that this person needs to stay home?"; they have been looking at, "What is the minimum we can give this person so that we make sure that our budget goes until March 31?" That's all.

So now the care coordinators will be allowed to be in primary care, will be allowed to be in hospitals, will be allowed to be within those private home care people. Do I have a problem with that? No. A primary care provider coordinator will know your needs. But what's the point of it if, at the end of the day, what you need has nothing to do with what you will get? All you get is two baths a week, no matter what your needs are. You're actually lucky if you get those two baths, because I guarantee you that for one of those two, the PSW will phone in to say that she can't make it, that she has been booked elsewhere. "We'll have to reschedule. You'll have your two baths, both of them, on Saturday, one at 8 a.m. and the other one at 8 p.m." What is this? We have to do better. We have to stop failing all of those people.

What we have right here in front of us are huge changes that don't address the main problem we have in our home care system. The fundamental changes that need to happen are not there. We can agree that better coordination is necessary, but what's the point if, at the end of the day, there is no money to give you anything but two baths a week, no matter what your needs are?

So I will try to work as best I can, but I have lots of doubts.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm pleased to have a chance to respond to the minister's introduction of this bill and the new plan to modernize home and community care in Ontario.

I just came from Ottawa. I actually went home yesterday because our caregiver who we got through the LHIN is sick this week. So it does have direct impacts on families' lives. Out of four of us, we had to figure out how we were going to balance out the week. We have a great caregiver.

I do want to say that I agree with the member from Nickel Belt in terms of how we compensate those people who care for the people we care for most. It's a tough job. The better a job we can do of coordinating care and making those jobs pay well, and have some support with benefits—and make them jobs that are a bit easier to handle. If you're going back and forth between five or six places, your life can get turned upside down pretty quickly. So I have a lot of respect for the people who do that work.

The member from Nickel Belt accurately states that we have to do more to make it a good place for those people to work, earn a living and raise a family, because right now it's not. That's why we're not getting them into the profession.

All of the stated goals in this work here, I agree with. I want the government to succeed, because if the government succeeds and does it the right way, everything will be good for people. The challenge is always in making

sure that we get it right, so I look forward to looking at each of those measures and ensuring that we get the right outcome. There are dangers and risks in all the things that we do, even with the best intent.

Here's a home care story. It's not a great home care story. My dad had inoperable oral cancer, and he had to wait about three or four weeks to get his three palliative radiations, because there was an administrative hiccup at the physician's office. So he gets out of his three palliative radiations—and the physician had said to him, “You have about six months to live, so we're going to give you these radiations, and it's going to make your life more comfortable.” He finished the radiations, and he got about 15 hours a week, which was fine; we could manage that, but we could have used a bit more help. He was supposed to go up to 22 hours a week.

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He's palliative now. We called the CCAC just before Christmas. Here's the response that we got: “Well, I'm retiring. There will be a new person in January to deal with your case.” This is somebody who has got three or four months to live. It got solved.

These things really impact families. It's not always based in the system that is there. It can have a lot to do with it, but it's based in the ethos and the leadership of the people who are working in it. That's one of the challenges in the family health teams, I'll say: There's a great opportunity, but there's great risk that things like that happen.

We, all six of us—hopefully, eight by Friday—want to work with you. We want to make sure that families get the things that they need and that people who are working in home care—it's a really tough job, and it gets a raw deal sometimes.

There are thousands of people in thousands of places today, right now, providing excellent care. I always believe that the predominance of care is excellent care. Maybe there's not enough of it, but there are a lot of people out there who really care, and they're doing the best they can for the people they serve. Our job is to make the system work better for them, better for the people that they serve, and support them, as the member said, by ensuring that it's a good place for people to work, and that they can raise a family and they can stay in that job that, arguably, many of them—that I know, anyway—love and very much do with love.

I want to thank you very much, Speaker.

PETITIONS

TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is titled “Give Prisoners Access to Free Phones Now.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Bell acts like a champion of mental health, they jeopardize the well-being of prisoners and their families by putting up barriers to communication;

“Whereas Bell has a monopoly over the federal and provincial prison phone systems in Canada and Ontario;

“Whereas phone calls cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars per month for prisoners and their families, and collect calls can only be made to landlines;

“Whereas disconnection and isolation can result in poverty, mental health challenges, and suicide—and creates barriers for community reintegration upon release;

“Whereas phone companies like Bell and the province of Ontario profit off of the most marginalized among us; and

“Whereas Bell's contract with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is up for renewal in 2020;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to act to ensure free calling for prisoners; direct calls to cell phones and lines with switchboards; and no 20-minute cut-off calls.”

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

FOOD SAFETY

Mrs. Nina Tangri: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas people who are on a farm without consent may not be aware that they can actually spread diseases and contaminants which can cause stress and harm to the animals;

“Whereas many farmers across Ontario are worried about trespassers putting their animals and the farmers' families at risk. For many farmers their home and their work is the same place and everyone has a right to feel safe in their own home;

“Whereas despite the right of people to participate in legal protests, it does not include the right to trespass on private property, to make farmers feel unsafe in their homes or to risk introducing disease or contaminants to our animals or food supply;

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

“Proceed as effectively as possible to protect farmers, their animals, livestock transporters, and the integrity of Ontario's food supply, while also ensuring that farmers feel safe in their homes and at the workplace by maintaining animal health and safety by immediately passing Bill 156, the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, so that:

“(1) Persons are prohibited from entering in or on the animal protection zones without the prior consent of the owner or occupier of the farm, facility or premises;

“(2) Persons are prohibited from interfering or interacting with farm animals in or on the animal protection zones or from carrying out prescribed activities in or on the animal protection zones without the prior consent of the owner or occupier of the farm, facility or premises;

“(3) Persons are prohibited from interfering with a motor vehicle that is transporting farm animals and from interfering or interacting with the farm animals in the

motor vehicle without the prior consent of the driver of the motor vehicle.”

I attach my name to this and I look forward to it being passed.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I’d like to thank Lauren Goldsack, a student from Catholic Central School, who is here with us today, and who coordinated a petition campaign on behalf of the London West Youth Cabinet. The petition reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas this government is dramatically increasing class sizes starting in grade 4, which will result in thousands fewer teachers and education workers, and less help for every student;

“Whereas increased class sizes and fewer staff means course and program options for secondary students will be reduced significantly;

“Whereas mandatory online learning will increase inequality and compound difficulty for students already struggling in face-to-face classes;

“Whereas funding cuts in education will mean less services and fewer resources to support student needs;

“Whereas students in Ontario deserve better and should have a voice when it comes to the future of their education;

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

“—stop the funding cuts to classrooms and invest to strengthen public education in Ontario;

“—reverse class size increases;

“—eliminate the requirement for mandatory online learning courses for every secondary student;

“—increase supports and resources for students with special needs;

“—allow students to be involved in developing educational policy that affects them.”

It’s signed by hundreds of students. I am proud to affix my name to this petition. I will give it to page Daniel to take to the table.

TUITION

Ms. Jessica Bell: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a compulsory 10% tuition cut with no compensating increase to government funding will have a huge negative impact on post-secondary education;

“Whereas eliminating the OSAP tuition grants for low-income students will make post-secondary education even less accessible to underprivileged members of our society;

“Whereas eliminating the six-month interest-free grace period for student loans will increase the student debt burden and make post-secondary study less accessible to low-income students;

“Be it resolved that the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party commit to reversing their policy changes to

OSAP by restoring the six-month interest rate grace period and the 2018 model of grant and loan ratios; and

“Match the 10% tuition cuts with an equal increase to government funding for Ontario colleges and universities.”

I support this petition. I’ll be affixing my signature to it and giving it to page Rudra.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Catherine Fife: This petition is entitled “Give Prisoners Access to Free Phones Now!

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the House of Commons, and Bell Canada:

“Whereas Bell acts like a champion of mental health, they jeopardize the well-being of prisoners and their families by putting up barriers to communication;

“Whereas Bell has a monopoly over the federal and provincial prison phone systems in Canada and Ontario;

“Whereas phone calls cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars per month for prisoners and their families, and collect calls can only be made to landlines;

“Whereas disconnection and isolation can result in poverty, mental health challenges, and suicide—and creates barriers for community reintegration upon release;

“Whereas phone companies like Bell and the province of Ontario profit off of the most marginalized among us; and

“Whereas Bell’s contract with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is up for renewal in 2020;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the House of Commons and Bell Canada to ensure free calling for prisoners; direct calls to cell phones and lines with switchboards; and no 20-minute cut-off on calls.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Paige.

HOME CARE

Mr. Lorne Coe: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas after 15 years of neglect under successive Liberal governments, the demand for home care services has far outstripped the ability of care providers to coordinate these services;

“Whereas decisions about home care are currently often made in bureaucratic settings using a siloed approach that does not allow for individual patient circumstances to be taken into account;

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“Whereas care plans can currently have service maximums for set hours that result in patients receiving insufficient care, care scheduled in ways that are suboptimal for patients and providers;

“Whereas Ontario health teams are set to transform health care in Ontario with a greater focus on the patient and on easing transitions between different kinds of care;

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

“Proceed as effectively as possible to support the improvement of home care services and the coordination of these services so that Ontarians can receive the support they need....”

I support the content of this petition. I'll affix my signature to it and provide it to page Giselle.

DOCUMENTS GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais remercier Danielle Barbeau-Rodrigue, Lyse Lamothe, Paul-André Gauthier, Jacques Babin et toute l'équipe de l'ACFO du grand Sudbury pour ces pétitions.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Alors qu'il est important d'avoir le nom exact des personnes sur les cartes émises par le gouvernement, tels la carte santé ou le permis de conduire;

« Alors que plusieurs personnes francophones ont des accents dans l'épellation de leur nom;

« Alors que le ministère des Transports et le ministère de la Santé ont confirmé que le système informatique de l'Ontario ne permet pas l'enregistrement des lettres avec des accents », des trémas, ou des cédilles;

Ils demandent à « l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario pour qu'elle s'assure que les accents », trémas, ou cédilles « de la langue française soient inclus sur tous les documents et cartes émis par le gouvernement de l'Ontario », et ce, « avant le 31 décembre 2020. »

J'appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et je demande à Hannah de l'amener aux greffiers.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My petition is “Give Prisoners Access to Free Phones Now.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the House of Commons and Bell Canada:

“Whereas Bell acts like a champion of mental health, they jeopardize the well-being of prisoners and their families by putting up barriers to communication;

“Whereas Bell has a monopoly over the federal and provincial prison phone systems in Canada and Ontario;

“Whereas phone calls cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars per month for prisoners and their families, and collect calls can only be made to land lines;

“Whereas disconnection and isolation can result in poverty, mental health challenges, and suicide—and creates barriers for community reintegration upon release;

“Whereas phone companies like Bell and the province of Ontario profit off of the most marginalized among us; and

“Whereas Bell's contract with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is up for renewal in 2020;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the House of Commons and Bell Canada to ensure free calling for prisoners; direct calls to cell phones and lines with switchboards; and no 20-minute cut-off on calls.”

I completely agree with this petition, and will be affixing my signature to it and giving it to Juliana to take to the Clerk.

REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas given the changes to the real estate industry, technology and regulatory practices over the last two decades, it is essential that the rules for real estate brokerages and professionals reflect contemporary business practices;

“Whereas consumer protection, increased professionalism, efficient and effective regulation, strong business environment and reducing red tape and regulatory burden on businesses are key to the well-being of the province of Ontario;

“Whereas for years Ontario realtors have advocated for higher professional standards, stronger consumer protections and better enforcement of the rules governing real estate practices;

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

“Proceed as effectively as possible to increase consumer confidence, enhance standards for real estate professionals and brokerages and provide additional flexibility to keep pace with a modern marketplace by immediately passing Bill 145, An Act to amend the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002, so that:

“(1) The act is renamed the Trust in Real Estate Services Act, 2002;

“(2) Abolishes the appeals committee and provides for appeals from decisions of the discipline committee to instead be handled by the Licence Appeal Tribunal;

“(3) Create a new exemption in respect of personal real estate corporations and prescribed members of such corporations, however this exemption be subject to prescribed conditions;

“(4) The discipline committee's jurisdiction is broadened beyond the code of ethics under the act to include determining whether a registrant has contravened any provisions of the act itself or other regulations under the act. The discipline committee is also given authority to make orders applying conditions to, suspending or revoking registration.”

I agree with this and will be passing it on to page Rachel.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Jill Andrew: This petition is called the “Petition for Real Protections from Above-Guideline Rent Increases.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas housing is a human right;

“Whereas rental rates in Toronto—St. Paul’s and across Ontario are increasingly unaffordable;

“Whereas we need to protect our affordable housing stock in Ontario;

“Whereas paying to maintain a building should be the responsibility of the landlord;

“Whereas above-guideline rent increases can increase rent well over what people can afford;

“Whereas inaction on this issue will mean thousands of Ontarians will be forced from their homes;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately review above-the-guideline increase rules and regulations, and ensure that rental housing remains affordable in Ontario.”

I couldn’t agree with this more. I sign my signature to it, and I’m handing it to Jessica.

ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas over the last 15 long years under the previous Liberal government costs for businesses skyrocketed;

“Whereas the Ford government has been eliminating thousands of regulations and ensuring regulation to the point of integrity by introducing the Making Ontario Open For Business Act, Restoring Ontario’s Competitiveness Act and the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act;

“Whereas the government has reduced business premiums for the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board; and

“Whereas the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade has” travelled “to Asia and the United States on trade missions...;

“Whereas our government has scrapped the job-killing carbon tax; and

“Whereas our government has reduced the cost of energy by passing the Access to Natural Gas Act and the Fixing the Hydro Mess Act; and

“Whereas since June 2018 Ontario has added 307,800 new jobs; and

“Whereas the province of Ontario has added more jobs than in any 12-month period since statistics on job numbers have been recorded;

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

“That the government continue its” actions “to reduce the cost of doing business in Ontario with the goal of building on the record-breaking job number of the past 18 months.”

I agree with this petition—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Hamilton Mountain.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Hamilton Mountain.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition that is titled “Support Ontario Families with Autism.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every child with autism deserves access to sufficient treatment and support so that they can live” their life “to their fullest potential;

“Whereas the Ontario Autism Program was badly broken under the Liberals, and the changes introduced by the Conservatives have made it worse; ...

“Whereas Ontario needs a true investment in evidence-based autism services that meets the needs of autistic children and their families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to invest in equitable, needs-based autism services for all children who need them.”

I couldn’t agree with this more, Mr. Speaker. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to page Connie to bring to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING TRANSIT FASTER ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020

SUR LA CONSTRUCTION PLUS RAPIDE DE TRANSPORT EN COMMUN

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 25, 2020, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 171, An Act to enact the Building Transit Faster Act, 2020 and make related amendments to other Acts /
Projet de loi 171, Loi édictant la Loi de 2020 sur la construction plus rapide de transport en commun et apportant des modifications connexes à d’autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Earlier today, the member for London West had the floor, so we return now to the member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It’s a pleasure for me to continue to participate on the debate on this bill. Just to recap for those members who were not here this morning, when I began my speech, I really focused on the fact that as a representative of London West, a regional centre of southwestern Ontario, one of our key priorities is to ensure that our region, our city, has those connections that we need—the transit, the transportation connections that we need to the GTA. The health and well-being and the economic prosperity of our region depend very much on what is happening in the GTA and our ability to move people and goods back and forth between London and the GTA.

This bill focuses on four priority transit projects within the GTA. Certainly, we want those projects to succeed. We also want an ability to link our region to the GTA so that we can take advantage of the opportunities that exist

in the GTA, and also so that people who live in our community and work in the GTA can continue their employment.

1540

So I moved from that little summary. I was just about to start to detail some of the concerns we have about this bill.

As I mentioned, yes, I think every MPP in this Legislature—definitely those of us in the official opposition—wants to get Ontario moving. We want to build transit, but we want to build it right. As our critic, my colleague the member for University–Rosedale, has pointed out, we have some significant reservations about what is proposed in this bill, and we are very concerned that this bill will not in fact allow transit to be built right.

Speaker, Bill 171 gives unprecedented powers to the Minister of Transportation to basically run roughshod over municipalities, over residents, in order to build, effectively, privatized transit. We have major, major concerns about giving the Minister of Transportation this level of power, the heavy hammer that is provided to the minister in this bill. I want to talk about some of those specific concerns.

Section 25, which deals with obstruction, states, “A person shall not hinder, obstruct or interfere with an obstruction removal.” When there’s transit to be built, there’s going to be expropriation that has to take place, and this legislation prohibits hindering, obstructing or interfering.

It goes on to say, “A person who hinders, obstructs or interferes with an obstruction removal loses any entitlement to compensation....” Unfortunately, “hinder,” “obstruct” and “interfere” are not defined in this bill. There is no clarity about what that means—to hinder, obstruct or interfere. So there is a very real concern that homeowners could be deprived of their right to compensation in the case of expropriation because they raised an objection, they asked some legitimate questions, they raised concerns about the plan. That is one example of the heavy-handedness of this bill that could really disadvantage Ontarians.

The other thing that I want to highlight is around the environmental assessment process. This bill includes provisions to speed up the environmental assessment process for the four transit projects that are listed in the legislation. Interestingly, three of those four projects have already had their environmental assessments approved. So the notion that the environment assessment is in any way holding up these transit projects is really called into question.

However, as we have seen in example after example of anti-environmental initiatives, this government has decided to rush through the environmental assessment process for transit projects. Not only are they going to compress the time frame from six months to three months, I believe, but they’re also going to undertake the environmental assessment at the very same time that they are launching the early construction of the project.

As anybody can realize, to have a project under way, to invest the funds that are necessary to get the transit project

going, and then to have an environmental assessment that may point out some big problems with the project, will cost taxpayers big time down the road because changes may be required—or maybe we’ll just accept that the environment is going to be damaged by the project. Oh, well. This government has introduced the legislation to allow that to happen.

The third point that I wanted to make, in the little time I have remaining, is around privatized transit construction. This bill sets out an explicit goal of aligning rules for transit construction with P3 procurement—despite what the Auditor General has said about P3 models costing \$8 billion more to taxpayers compared to public funding. But this government wants to use the P3 model. They want to actually expand the P3 model and allow P3 contractors to use what they term “innovation.” What this means is that these private sector contractors can “innovatively” decide how they are going to fulfill some of the deliverables that are set out in the transit project agreement, rather than having the contractors specify exactly what work will be done.

It doesn’t take much of a stretch of the imagination to realize how this could go wrong very easily, very quickly and in a very, very costly way. We’ve seen examples of P3 contractors who have really caused significant harm to communities. Just look at the Eglinton Crosstown.

We have big concerns about this bill enabling and expanding the P3 model.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It is now time for questions and comments.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the member: My parents live in Richmond Hill. One of the things I was really excited about when I got elected was being able to see them constantly. However, if I want to go visit them after work, using public transit, it takes me about two and a half hours to get from here to Richmond Hill, and if I were going to drive, again, it’s two hours in traffic.

My question to the member is, what is the NDP’s plan to solve congestion in the greater Toronto area?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: One doesn’t have to reflect too long on the history of transit construction in this province to recognize that it is political meddling that has been the downfall of resolving congestion issues in Ontario. We saw, under the former Harris government, a transit project that was well under way, the Eglinton subway. The government made the very blatant political decision to basically backfill a project that had already started. If there hadn’t been that level of political meddling, that project would be in place right now for the people of Toronto.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for your presentation. I have a question. This government says that they introduced this bill, Bill 171, in order to build transit to increase ridership. Can you talk a little bit about this government’s impacts on the London transit system and on ridership in London?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you to my colleague the member from University–Rosedale for her question.

Transit is a big issue in my community. The London Transit Commission has recently had to implement service cuts because of this government’s decision to cancel the planned doubling of the gas tax. Stability in operating funding is absolutely essential for transit commissions like the London Transit Commission to be able to expand routes and improve service. This government has shown no interest in providing the supports that municipal transit systems like LTC need to be able to provide that reliability—because people hesitate to use the transit system if they can’t get to where they need to be on time.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I hear them talk about the Eglinton Crosstown. When they talk about meddling, I think that comes back to the former Rae government, which allowed three projects to go on at the time without any—of course, they ran out of money. They couldn’t borrow any more money. We had three projects in Toronto where none of them were funded. The Harris government gave the city at the time its choice of which one they wanted to proceed with. That’s some of the history.

I heard this question earlier about what the NDP plans would be for transit in Toronto, and I haven’t heard them say anything. I know that even in my area of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, they made available considerable funds to the city of Cornwall to spend there. So what is the NDP doing?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Certainly MPPs who are sitting on this side of the House have observed, through the previous Liberal government and this Conservative government, some of the pitfalls of the P3 model as a way to fund transit. For example, we saw that in late 2008 the Eglinton Crosstown fell behind schedule. The solution of the operator, Metrolinx, was to shut down the Bathurst–Eglinton intersection for seven months, which would have been devastating to the businesses in that community. They backed off only after a huge public outcry.

What we see in Bill 171 are measures that would give Metrolinx and the government more ability to dismiss these kinds of community concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from London West for really addressing how these decisions are being made through this legislation. For instance, the political meddling that she referenced in her comments is very true from past governments as well. In fact, tomorrow the former Minister of Transportation—and his decision to influence the placement of a station in his riding—is before the public accounts committee.

My question to the member from London West is: How has this legislation addressed, in an open and transparent model, how these decisions are going to be made, and has this government really just doubled down on the politicization of sites of transit options?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank my colleague the member for Waterloo for her question. In response to the

first part of her question, “How has the government addressed these concerns in a transparent way?”, there is no transparency. Basically, what this bill does is allow the minister to make decisions that override municipal concerns. They override public concerns. It gives a hammer to the minister to make whatever decisions they want.

I would absolutely agree with the member that this bill is simply enabling the doubling down of the politicization of transit policy in this government that has resulted in bad planning and has really failed the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you, to the member opposite. I listened intently to your discussion. However, I do have concerns when you make claims that our government is anti-environmental. On the contrary, I can tell you that getting this plan through with public transit and subways built which have been sitting for decades, getting it done quicker and more efficiently, is going to save more greenhouse gases than the NDP can ever imagine. I believe this plan will be positive for the environment.

With that, all three levels of government are supporting the transit that we’ve put out. The federal government, which is a Liberal government, and the municipal government in Toronto are supportive. So why is it that the NDP stands alone and in isolation in opposing our transformation in transit in the GTA?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would challenge the member opposite about his comments on the environmental assessment process there. I heard my colleague the member for Toronto–Danforth this morning during the debate say quite accurately that, with this bill, the Minister of the Environment could be renamed the minister of rubber-stamping, because basically the environmental assessment process that is set out in this bill doesn’t actually allow an assessment of what is going to be the impact on the environment from this project and should these projects proceed or not. Basically, it puts the Minister of the Environment in the position of simply having to rubber-stamp, and that is no way to ensure that environmental protection aspects are taken into consideration.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I noticed in your speech, member for London West, that you pointed to the fact that environmental assessment processes for three of these transit lines have already been approved. Some of them were approved 10 years ago, so to argue that this bill is actually going to speed up transit construction is questionable. Could the member speak a little bit more about some of the underlying reasons why transit hasn’t been built in the GTHA?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I think that’s a really good question from my colleague the member for University–Rosedale. I go back to what I had said earlier about the politicization of transit decisions. We heard the example that the member for Waterloo raised about the location of a Vaughan subway stop. We know about the decision to fill

in the Eglinton subway. These kinds of political meddling are really what have undermined the ability to actually plan and implement well-thought-out transit policy for the people of this province.

I think that she, as a member from a Toronto riding, would have more insights than I would as the member for London West, but certainly we need to see legislation that enables strong, solid transit—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Further debate?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I am pleased to stand in the House today to speak to the Building Transit Faster Act.

In June 2018, the people of Ontario voted overwhelmingly for a government committed to getting the province moving. Each year, billions of dollars in economic productivity are lost due to gridlock. Our government is focused on putting an end to this problem and to providing needed relief for commuters. All levels of government support this plan and recognize the increasing demand for safe and reliable transportation options.

Mr. Speaker, we've reached a pivotal moment in history where all three levels of government agree on one single unified plan to get subways built. The consensus is clear: The time is now, to build better public transit.

In keeping with that commitment, we have introduced tools that are designed to get shovels in the ground on time and, of course, on budget. Our plan will address the key challenges we face when trying to get transit built. This proposed legislation is about cutting the unnecessary red tape and redundant steps that hold up major transit projects. We are going to get subways built quickly.

At this time, we are focused on the priority subway projects: the Ontario Line, the Scarborough subway extension, the Eglinton Crosstown West extension and the Yonge North subway extension.

What are some of the strategies that our government is proposing, to deliver the four subway projects? They include a modified environmental assessment process to reduce delays while maintaining strong environmental oversight; the ability to enter lands for due diligence; removal of obstructions and encroachments; addressing imminent danger; monitoring compliance with corridor development permits; and the requirement for owners of adjacent land and infrastructure to obtain a corridor development permit for construction and development activities that may interfere with subway construction.

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Mr. Speaker, the Building Transit Faster Act is a stand-alone piece of legislation that will, if passed, provide the tools needed to get our four priority subway projects built on time. It's important to note that these provisions will only apply to these projects.

The Building Transit Faster Act would give the province the tools to expedite the planning, the design and the construction process that have delayed major projects of this type in the past. If passed, this legislation would remove roadblocks and give the province the ability needed to deliver projects faster by relocating utilities more efficiently and within a set time frame while treating

businesses fairly and ensuring costs are not passed on to consumers.

MetroLinx could require a utility company to relocate its infrastructure within a prescribed time frame. It would introduce a clear process for managing disputes and allow MetroLinx to seek compensation from a utility company if timelines are not met. This is similar to the process used for highway projects.

The Ontario Energy Board would be prohibited from allowing provincially regulated utilities such as electricity and natural gas to pass compensation costs incurred from delays on to ratepayers, ensuring the assembly of land required to construct stations, conduct tunnelling and prepare sites, while treating property owners fairly.

Currently, redundant steps require Ontario to repeatedly demonstrate the need for land related to infrastructure projects one at a time. This would remove hearings of necessity for any property related to the four priority transit projects and avoid unnecessary delays. The province would continue to compensate people fairly whose properties are required. For municipal properties that are needed, municipalities will be given reasonable time limits for internal review to help keep the process on schedule, ensuring timely access to municipal services and rights of way. Our government will continue to work closely with municipalities, including the city of Toronto, to negotiate and secure permits.

In cases where an agreement cannot be reached, the Minister of Transportation could use a new legislative provision to issue an order that outlines the terms and conditions under which MetroLinx could use or modify a municipal road or service if needed.

The province will remain committed to working in partnership with municipalities and reducing the disruption to local communities as much as possible throughout the construction process, allowing Ontario to inspect and remove physical barriers such as trees with appropriate notification to property owners. Anyone entering property would be required to provide notice, abide by time-of-day restrictions and show identification. Similar provisions exist for highway projects, ensuring nearby developments or construction projects are coordinated so that the four priority subway projects are not delayed.

A permit would be required to construct or change any building, structure, road or underground utility infrastructure, as well as to perform any dewatering or excavation near a subway corridor. This would apply to new and some existing developments.

For existing approved developments that are identified as potential conflicts, there must be at least six months of negotiation before a permit decision can be imposed. This would give Ontario the ability to coordinate activities in and around the subway corridors and stations, and manage the timing of construction activities to prioritize the subway projects. The regulatory changes include updating the Building Code Act to make corridor development permits a formal part of the suite of building permits needed for a project.

Our proposed changes will ensure that we can get transit built, we can create jobs and we can provide economic benefits for our communities while maintaining strong environmental oversight.

The proposed changes support the government's commitment to making public transit an attractive, affordable and low-stress alternative to get people where they want to go when they want to get there.

Our government is committed to doing things differently. That is why the government is looking at ways to address obstacles that cause delays. Some of these new authorities are modelled on what the province already has in place for highways. For example, the ability to enter private land and the ability to coordinate activities in a transportation corridor are included in Ontario's Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act.

Our plan will get these four subway projects built quicker and at lower cost than what has been done in the past. We understand what needs to be done to get shovels in the ground. We are actively working to identify the barriers that cause delays and to build from lessons that we have learned.

Here's what industry partners are saying about the proposed Building Transit Faster Act—legislation that will help deliver Ontario's four priority subway projects on time, ensuring that people and businesses get the transit that they need and deserve sooner.

Jan De Silva, who is the president and CEO of Toronto Region Board of Trade, says, "Building transit more quickly is a key priority, not just for the business community but for residents as well." De Silva adds, "Clearing unnecessary roadblocks to ensure key transit projects are delivered on time and on budget is critical."

The director of government relations for LIUNA, Anthony Primerano, says, "LIUNA supports the accelerated transit proposal that will help expedite the much-needed transit infrastructure on time, on schedule and on budget." He added, "Cost certainty is essential to create confidence in the market, which will translate into needed construction jobs for our workers."

The city of Markham mayor, Frank Scarpitti, said he was "encouraged by the provincial government's move to streamline processes to build critical infrastructure and ensure ... transit projects like Yonge North subway extension are built on time."

Mr. Speaker, the legislation, if passed, would give Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario the tools that they need to ensure that these projects are completed without unnecessary setbacks. There are roadblocks on some transit projects that are causing years of delays. These impediments result in huge economic burdens. In the GTA alone, congestion results in the loss of \$11 billion in productivity each and every year. It also adds \$400 million to the cost of goods, and congestion obviously has a detrimental impact on our environment.

Then, of course, there are construction delays. They lead to increased project cost, resulting in added cost to the taxpayer, and many businesses are being forced to close up shop. We need to address our transit capacity as quickly

as possible. The people of Toronto simply cannot afford these costly delays.

Last fall, Toronto city council endorsed our subway plan—you've heard this throughout the day—with an overwhelming vote of 22 to 3. That is unprecedented, Mr. Speaker. Only one member of council voted against a motion to accelerate the delivery of transit expansion in Toronto.

Ontario remains committed to partnering with the city of Toronto to remove roadblocks and to engage with local residents and businesses on each and every project. In fact, it was just days ago—on February 14—that the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto moved forward on the shared commitment to deliver the largest subway expansion in Canadian history by signing the Ontario-Toronto transit partnership preliminary agreement. Mr. Speaker, the agreement outlines the principles and responsibilities of the province and the city of Toronto to deliver the four priority subway projects, modernize the subway network, and implement other major enhancements to public transit in Toronto. This would include working with municipalities to develop and facilitate streamlined processes to get the necessary permits and approvals to build transit faster. It would consult with Indigenous communities to ensure that Aboriginal and treaty rights and interests are considered in the decision-making process.

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Mr. Speaker, under this proposed legislation, our government is still going to respect property rights. We will negotiate in good faith and treat people fairly. But we're not going to spend a year getting permission to remove a tree.

Toronto's Eglinton Crosstown project could have been completed up to three years earlier if roadblocks had been removed. As you know, Metrolinx has indicated that the fall of 2021 is no longer an achievable deadline. Significant delays under the previous Liberal government and some recent construction complications mean that we are not going to see the line open until well into 2022. It's frustrating for our government, it's frustrating for businesses, and it is frustrating for commuters. I can only imagine how residents and businesses along Eglinton are taking this news.

These unacceptable project delays are why we are introducing legislation for the four priority projects. The people of Toronto simply cannot afford these delays. Simply put, we, and they, are out of time. This is why our government is committed to building a world-class transportation network that will boost economic growth. It will relieve congestion and get people to work and back to their loved ones on time.

The partnership announced last fall between the province and the city of Toronto has finally delivered one single unified plan for subway expansion in Toronto. Our government's collaborative efforts will deliver the largest subway expansion in Ontario's history. This key partnership will allow us to achieve our shared goals of addressing congestion and building transit infrastructure quickly and efficiently.

The Ontario Line is a bold proposal that will reduce road congestion, shorten travel times and create greater connections for commuters right across Toronto. We are investing in a historic \$28.5-billion subway expansion that will increase the length of our subway system by more than 50%. The Ontario Line will help many, including commuters, low-income communities and students—the millions of people who rely on transit each and every day in Toronto. The Ontario Line will get people out of their cars and into public transit. It will help the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. And it will spark additional investment in Toronto.

Expanded transit creates thousands of sustainable jobs for the future. As our Minister of Transportation has said, “In order to keep up with the tremendous growth in the region, we have to build modern, efficient rapid transit. It will not only generate years of employment; it will allow us to better connect a world-class city and develop transit-oriented communities.”

Mr. Speaker, these collaborative efforts will deliver the largest subway expansion in Ontario’s history. It’s true that our subway plan is bold and ambitious. But the plan is reasonable and attainable. If passed, this legislation would bring us one step closer to making these new subway networks a reality.

Our government’s goal is to deliver Ontario’s four priority subway projects on time and on budget. We will work closely with Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario to determine where the biggest risks of delays originate and whether there are opportunities to minimize these risks. The proposed legislation demonstrates Ontario’s real commitment to delivering transit faster for people in the GTA, reducing congestion and connecting people to places and people to jobs.

The proposed changes support the government’s commitment to making public transit an attractive, affordable and low-stress alternative to get people where they need to go, when they need to get there. The province announced its historic new transportation vision in April of last year. The \$28.5-billion plan will move the province’s aging public transit system into the 21st century.

In June, the Getting Ontario Moving Act was enacted to enable provincial ownership of the subway extensions and the new lines envisioned in Ontario’s new subway transit plan for the GTA.

Political squabbling has prevented big projects from being built here in Toronto for decades. We’ve cut through political gridlock with our landmark partnership with the city of Toronto.

Mr. Speaker, our government is keeping its promise to build better public transit on time and on budget, while protecting taxpayers. We are committed to building four new subway lines within accelerated timelines:

—the Ontario Line, delivered as early as 2027, two years earlier than the Relief Line South;

—the Yonge North subway extension, delivered by 2029-30;

—the three-stop Scarborough subway extension, delivered by 2029-30; and

—the Eglinton Crosstown West extension, delivered by 2030-31.

All of these projects have ambitious timelines.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to building a world-class transportation network that will boost economic growth. It will relieve congestion. It will get people to work. It will get people back home to their loved ones on time.

As I mentioned, the partnership announced last fall between the province and the city of Toronto has finally delivered one single unified plan for subway expansion in Toronto. Our government’s collaborative efforts will deliver the largest subway expansion in this province’s history.

This proposed legislation will get people riding the trains sooner. It will ensure that the province is best positioned to attract new business. It will help our best and brightest people living and working here in Toronto, here in the GTHA, right across Ontario.

Our government is working closely with our municipal and federal partners and listening to the construction sector and to public feedback as we move forward with our plan to get Ontario moving.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It is now time for questions and responses.

Ms. Catherine Fife: First, I’d just like to welcome my mother, Sheila Wood, to the Legislature. Welcome, Mum. Usually, she’s watching at home.

My question to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook is that the public accounts committee, following recommendations from the auditor, has made recommendations to the government and this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I apologize to the member from Waterloo.

Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I’d like debate to continue, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Therefore, I return to the member from Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Flamborough–Glanbrook has failed to address one of the key recommendations, in her comments, as it pertains to Bill 171, in that the Auditor General asks that Infrastructure Ontario and Metrolinx, agencies of the government, initiate an independent, transparent and rigorous assessment of the costs and benefits embedded in the traditional delivery model, in comparison with the public-private partnership model, before signing a contract.

Why have you just steamrolled ahead with public-private partnerships, given the concerns of the Auditor General and the public accounts committee, which your own members sit on?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you to the member from Waterloo.

We are not steamrolling ahead and not listening to people. The reason we are introducing this legislation is because we are listening to people. We are listening to stakeholders. We are listening to businesses. We are listening to commuters. We are listening to the people who voted for us back in June 2018, who sent us to Queen's Park with a very clear message, and that is to get projects built and to address congestion here in the city of Toronto. This act is going to do that. It is going to give people who are involved in the process of building four key transit projects in the city of Toronto the tools to expedite the process, to get them built faster, not only on time, but on budget. That is rare for a government in Ontario, but that is a promise that we made to the people of Ontario, and that is a promise that we will be able to deliver on because of this proposed legislation.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook: I'd like you to go on and explain a little bit more about the cost certainty that we feel will be derived from this new model, and also address the part about the obstruction, hindering and delay. I think we all know a lot about hindering, obstructing and delay after the last few days. Perhaps you could elucidate on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Was that your question?

The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Ms. Donna Skelly: This is the reason why we are introducing this legislation. It's to ensure that taxpayers get value for the dollars, their hard-earned tax dollars.

This legislation is going to expedite a process. As a former city councillor for the city of Hamilton, I know what happens when projects are delayed: The cost soars. We've seen it time and time again. We, as Conservatives, as members of this government, believe that we owe our residents across Ontario the confidence that, when we move forward in a multi-billion-dollar project—that we believe it is not only going to move people, commuters, but it will also move goods across not only Toronto but the GTHA. There are hard dollars associated with that.

We are introducing this legislation to get transit built so that we can help move people and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: I listened intently to the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook as she spoke about Toronto, as she spoke about subways. And I was waiting, on a whim, to hear her speak about Hamilton, about the transit system and the LRT that this government cancelled after they promised to mind their own business.

We had a municipal election which overwhelmingly said "pro-LRT," and yet this government cancelled funding. It allowed expropriation eight months before their magical decision to change the landscape of the LRT. I

was waiting on pins and needles to hear about all-day, two-way GO from Niagara to Toronto to allow people from Hamilton to be able to move quickly and to clear up some of that congestion. But I heard nothing except "Toronto."

Will the member tell us why she and the Ford government refuse to listen to the people of Hamilton and their want for the LRT?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I would like to remind the member from across the floor that this bill simply addresses the city of Toronto. But I am so proud to stand here and remind the member opposite that the reason why the funding for the LRT was cancelled was, again, it was over budget. That's what this piece of legislation is going to address and ensure that taxpayers in Ontario get.

That project went from \$1 billion to \$5 billion. I don't know if the member opposite thinks that that's a good use of taxpayers' dollars, but I can tell you that the members I spoke to in her riding and the members I spoke to in my riding didn't think it was good value for their hard-earned tax dollars.

But I will tell you that the city of Hamilton is overjoyed to be getting \$1 billion to spend on transit projects. That is truly unprecedented. I am proud, as the member for Hamilton, representing the city of Hamilton, that we are getting \$1 billion for transit projects in the city of Hamilton—unprecedented in the province—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Question, please.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I know I'm hearing some bantering back and forth, but I guess, with that \$1 billion that they projected, they could always build it—if that's what they projected the cost would be.

Anyway, in what ways will passing the Building Transit Faster Act support an open-for-business environment in our province?

Ms. Donna Skelly: This truly does speak to our open-for-business mantra and our belief that we have to create an environment for businesses to do what they do best, and that is thrive. We've seen it, Mr. Speaker. We've seen it time and again: over 300,000 new jobs in Ontario because of the policies that this government has introduced. This will simply add to that process.

We are creating an environment for people to get to work faster. Congestion costs our economy in Ontario billions and billions of dollars. This will get people to their jobs quicker. It will get people off the roads into transit, which means we can also move goods faster. It is just one more way of growing the economy in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Jessica Bell: The member talked about the benefits of the P3 model and how, with the P3 model, in theory, you can transfer the risk to the private sector. The challenge that we see, like we're seeing in Ottawa right now, as well as with the Eglinton Crosstown, is that, in reality, the company tends to take the profit, but the risk is transferred back to the government and the taxpayer.

In the case of the Eglinton Crosstown, the company was paid a premium on signing and then was paid an extra \$237 million to finish the project on time. The company

has failed to deliver on that promise. Is this government going to ask for that money back?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Again, I want to thank the member opposite for the question, but I want to remind members opposite that the objective of this piece of legislation is to get these projects built quickly. We know that when we get them built quickly, we will save money, but we will hold stakeholders accountable as well.

Mr. Speaker, this is a new way, a novel way, for government to do business. It's new because we've only been in power for less than two years. We saw how the previous government spent money and wasted money, thus the reason why we have such an historic debt. We are drowning in debt. But we know we need to move forward, because to address that debt, to tackle that debt, to create enough revenue to spend on the things that people need—increased health care, better health care, more long-term-care beds—we have to grow our economy. This legislation is going to work towards that. It will get people to work and goods moving faster.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for a 30-second question and a 30-second response.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll be very quick, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, I wanted to congratulate the member, who was able to secure a \$1-billion investment for the city of Hamilton. I can say, as a member who comes from a community with over a million people, that I am jealous of that investment. I wonder if she could comment on how important the \$1-billion investment that she secured for her riding is to the people of Hamilton.

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm so proud to again remind the members opposite that the city of Hamilton has been given \$1 billion for transit projects. It has never, ever happened anywhere in Ontario, and that is without matching dollars from the municipality.

Mr. Speaker, I will be so proud to stand here in the House and talk about all of the incredible projects that we—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please. Thank you.

It's time for further debate. I turn to the member from Toronto—St. Paul's.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Good afternoon, Speaker. I'm glad to join the debate today on government Bill 171, a bill that myself and our official opposition definitely agree will not guarantee transit gets built faster. This government must properly fund public transit, so I want to start there.

I actually want to read something that I discovered, because I'm not an expert on P3s. But I read this wonderful article by the School of Public Policy, SPP research papers. It says: "The popularity of public-private partnerships ... as a way for governments to get infrastructure built, continues to grow. But while the public is often led to believe that this is because they result in a more efficient use of taxpayer funds and a more streamlined process, this is not necessarily the case. In fact, the clearest advantage

that PPPs"—or P3s—"offers is to politicians, who are able to transfer to private partners the risks of miscalculated construction costs and revenue projections (as with a toll road, for example)....

"Even from the very start of the process, there are often a limited number of private consortia equipped to bid on major" P3s, "which already leads to the potential for bidders to build in higher profits, and thus, higher costs for taxpayers."

I'll stop there, but it's clear that this notion of private-public partnerships as the way to go for our public transit isn't necessarily a foolproof idea.

I return to the idea of the government funding transit properly. Let's start there. The chronic underfunding has meant slow, substandard and overcrowded service as the norm.

1630

I have to give a shout-out to our wonderful critic for transit and her amazing motion 46. The government has asked, "What is the official opposition proposing?" We're proposing that the provincial government should match municipalities' funding contributions to operating and maintaining municipal transit systems across Ontario, and that funding should not be used to replace or reduce municipal contributions to transit.

We rely on public transit, clearly, to get everywhere we need to go: work, school, the hospital, you name it. Our communities deserve public transit systems that are fast—we do want to be up and moving—affordable and accessible. As it stands right now, this government has certainly proved that they are way below the mark of that.

In my riding of St. Paul's, our TTC stations are overflowing with riders. I would encourage any member of the House to stop by Eglinton station during rush hour; it's quite an experience. Of course, if you think we don't need increased investment in transit infrastructure, that visit will change your mind. We desperately need it.

In fact, currently, the TTC has the lowest per-rider government subsidy of any major North American transit agency. This is an absolute disgrace. While other cities across North America are looking for ways to encourage the use of public transit, including lowering or—whoa—eliminating fares, the TTC still relies heavily on fares to fund its operations, so much so that TTC fares have been rising nearly twice as fast as inflation over the last 20 years.

Let's put that into perspective. Many riders are underemployed or unemployed. They're low-wage earners or seniors on fixed incomes, among other vulnerable groups. Instead of the government ensuring that our transit systems are properly funded so they can actually be done on a timely schedule, the cost is being off-loaded on those who cannot afford it at all. We're asking the most vulnerable of riders to bankroll public transit, and that is just not acceptable.

It's especially unacceptable while we're facing a climate emergency. In a world where we need to be encouraging more people to take transit and reduce their emissions, we can't afford to cut corners on environmental

assessment processes. We will never accomplish this if we keep making transit more expensive and less convenient to use. Currently, transit riders across the province, including in my riding of St. Paul's, face overcrowding, delays, long wait times and regular fare hikes because local transit systems are underfunded by this Conservative government.

I would be remiss if I didn't say, although it's not directly related to the Eglinton Crosstown, that there was a Premier once, you know—Mike Harris—who decided to fill a hole that was already paid for, which made delays around construction even worse. Bringing the ball back to our most recent Premier, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Minister Wynne—when she was the Minister of Transportation—when they delayed the Eglinton Crosstown with a \$4-billion cut in 2010. I understand that it was around then that the “Save Transit” buttons went viral. Everyone had a “Save Transit” button. Also, the TTC in 2012 actually informed the public that the Liberals' choice to secure a P3 procurement would, essentially, hurt transit.

Currently, transit riders across the province are not very happy. So I'm wondering: Does that sound like a system that's particularly attractive to new riders?

Historically, the province would subsidize 50% of the operating costs of municipal transit agencies. That was, of course, until former Premier Mike Harris and his then Harris Conservatives scrapped this funding program as part of their cuts in the late 1990s. Next, there were the 15 years of the Liberal circus, sitting on their hands doing nothing to fix the problem, allowing municipal transit agencies to develop a huge repair-and-maintenance backlog, which sort of jogs my memory around the Liberals' care, or lack thereof, of education and their lacklustre fight to secure education development charges for our public school system. But I digress.

This government has made things even worse by cancelling a planned increase to the transit transfer, which comes out of the gas tax and helps fund municipal transit programs. The cancellation has cost municipalities across the province \$3 billion, I was told, in lost transit investments over the next 10 years. That's a lot of money, \$3 billion—\$3 billion that could have been spent modernizing our transit systems, building new stops and stations—and, let me say, accessible stops and stations for all diverse-ability riders—or even simply working to keep our fares down, with no hikes. This short-sighted government has done incredible harm to our transit system. Again, I want to reiterate that Bill 171 is not actually going to build transit faster. In fact, what it does is take away some of the power and some of the decision-making abilities of our very municipalities.

Again, transportation is not my file, but when the government says, “We have support from all levels of government,” but I know that there are municipalities that are not excited and are not thrilled about these particular changes and the way they've been done and their impact on communities, I think we have to ensure that we're sharing the most transparent and correct version of the truth.

The good news is, we can fix this, with the right approach. Again, by matching a municipality's operating subsidies for public transit, this Conservative government would ensure that transit agencies can expand service and make much-needed improvements. Provincial funding from this government would mean that this could happen without agencies having to resort to fare hikes to cover costs. With service expansion and affordable fares, more people can take public transit, meaning less congestion, less pollution and safer communities.

Increasing the funds, of course, would also be incredibly helpful when we're expanding our transit networks, as well. As it stands, underfunding has meant that construction of the Eglinton Crosstown through my riding has been a disaster for local businesses. Now, don't get me wrong: We need to build more transit. However, we need to make sure that we're doing everything possible to make construction as painless as possible, and consistent with direct, comprehensive and transparent consultation—with my St. Paul's community and, frankly, anyone impacted by this current construction disaster.

So far, this government has failed our neighbourhoods. We need immediate action and financial support for our small business owners. Of course, communities like Little Jamaica and Scarborough urgently need new transit options to thrive. But long-established small businesses will not be around to reap the benefits without support during construction. Right now, the main intersections around Dufferin and Eglinton and Bathurst and Eglinton are still a mess with gridlock. Yonge and Eglinton is a disaster, as I mentioned earlier. Getting on and off the Allen is still very time-consuming, to say the least.

Up and down Eglinton, businesses are continuing to suffer, and there is less and less foot and car traffic on Eglinton as people try to avoid the area. What this means, as well, is, that even for people who visit the areas, oftentimes there just isn't enough parking. So you can't really participate in consuming the goods if you can't park the car, or if you can't see the building behind the walls and whatnot.

I have called on this Conservative government to put a plan in place to support local business owners who are suffering because of the Liberal and Conservative failures on the Eglinton Crosstown. I made this call to action as we were learning that construction on the Crosstown has been delayed yet again, until well into 2022. That's a long time. If we don't act, many small businesses will not survive the further delay.

Liberals and Conservatives have bungled the Eglinton Crosstown project so badly that it has been sidetracked again. Businesses in our vibrant communities like Little Jamaica and mid-town are already paying the price, and they simply can't afford to keep hanging on by a thread, racked with debt and stress, for two more years.

Local business owners have been dealing with the impact of construction on the Eglinton Crosstown since 2011. The Crosstown was originally supposed to be completed in 2020. It now won't be completed until sometime in—in fact, I've read somewhere that said “deep

into 2022,” so we’re not talking January here. Neither Metrolinx nor the Ford government has provided any form of financial compensation for these small businesses.

I have to say that Metrolinx does not compensate business owners or tenants in the form of tax breaks or operating subsidies for businesses that remain open during construction. They are completely at the mercy, as I said back in December, of the pie-in-the-sky completion dates of transportation plans. Frankly, what it has meant is that families are hemorrhaging and they’re being forced to rely on foodbanks.

1640

A little segue on how transportation becomes an equity issue in St. Paul’s: There were 12,568 visits to food banks by our residents in 2018, and 22% of those who used them were children. And in case this government is wondering, 44% of food bank users have a post-secondary degree—so much for the stereotypes around laziness or around an unwillingness to “strive” and have resilience. The key is, resilience doesn’t work on its own. We have to have public services to allow our resilience to shine.

Furthermore, the unemployment rate for Toronto–St. Paul’s is higher than Toronto as a whole. Some 2,280 children are living below the poverty line in St. Paul’s. And there are 14 food banks operating in our area.

I share these stats to demonstrate that access to safe, moving and responsibly developed transit is also part of a larger conversation, a larger action item of community members in my riding being able to travel to access points, employment centres, job interviews and the like.

The impacts of not investing in transit are complex and varied. One example is from a member of my community, Clare DeMello. I heard from Clare, a senior citizen in St. Paul’s. She’s a retired health care worker. She reached out to my office to say that one of the greatest challenges she has is social isolation. For people on fixed incomes like Clare, the rising costs of fares mean she cannot afford to travel to go to meetings and programs for seniors, such as the amazing year-round programs we have at Central Eglinton Community Centre, run by John Carey—hey, John—and a great group of caring service providers and volunteers who are eager to serve our seniors. According to Clare, Wheel-Trans is not always reliable. She continues to advocate for free transit for seniors, just like it is for children.

Just revisiting this whole transportation scandal, at least since I’ve been sitting—and I recognize I’m still a new member and I’m still learning the way here: Last year, when the government introduced Bill 107, Getting Ontario Moving, which was time-allocated, yet again, it was a demonstration of this government not wanting to consult with everyday people like Clare, instead preferring to ram bills through even though they don’t actually get people moving—or in today’s Bill 171, which flies in the face of responsible development that ensures community infrastructure is in place to support transit development targets.

Transit can’t be built without thinking about the unique needs of our seniors, our low-income riders, our riders with disabilities. A transit plan that really works for

everyone would include increased coverage and frequency of service in transit deserts—areas that already face shortages of services like grocery stores, medical and social services, where people cannot afford to live where they work or study.

I was looking on my desk for the scholar who wrote a wonderful dissertation, or it might have been a master’s thesis, on the gentrification of Little Jamaica, based on the construction and just the way in which this construction has really impacted certain neighbourhoods disproportionately to others—neighbourhoods that are predominantly black and racialized. This author highlighted the fact that banks aren’t very “present” in Little Jamaica. What does it say if there are Cash Money loans places, all these spots to take advantage of someone when they are broke or in need of a quick fix in terms of paying rent—“You can come get your cash here”—but there are no banks? That’s something a little interesting to think of in terms of: When we’re developing, what are we developing, what are we prioritizing in certain neighbourhoods, and what are we conveniently or very consciously leaving out from certain neighbourhoods? And what does that say about what we think certain neighbourhoods can actually attain or strive towards?

Affordable, well-maintained and well-serviced transit is a racial, disability, housing and economic justice issue where people with bad or inconsistent access to transit live at the intersections of many competing barriers.

If I go back to a note that I saw around Bill 171, I recently learned that the Ontario Line passes through lower-income neighbourhoods, like Thorncliffe Park, that will be exposed to construction disruption. The concerns of such neighbourhoods, with many racialized residents, have often been given lower priority by decision-makers than those of other neighbourhoods. So we have to recognize that there are inequity issues here.

Also, I want to read this other piece here before I go back. The minister, actually, I understand, may order a municipality to provide access to a municipal right of way—i.e., a road closure or whatnot—or a municipal service, such as a shutdown of water supply. Metrolinx must first try to reach an agreement, but the fact is, the minister could come in on any day and say, “Boom, water’s gone.” Right? And that’s just the way it is.

There are no standards in this bill to limit how much construction disruption a community must endure. There is no provision to require notification before cutting off power or water supplies or to limit how long these services can be shut off. I think about people who are renters in apartments. I’m a renter; I’m in an apartment. I think about the times where you’re helping that elderly person carry up those No Frills bags or you’re literally seeing someone on the back of someone being hoisted down because the elevator is down or whatever issue is down because there’s construction happening.

This Conservative government is turning their backs on business owners in my riding as closed signs sprout up along Eglinton Avenue, flying in the face of the Conservative claim that Ontario is open for business. As I said

yesterday during a meeting with the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the Eglinton Crosstown is the gift that's not giving. Or said otherwise, it's the gift that keeps on taking. We have to figure out a way to get this working better.

I see that my time is it running away. I would like to say that we've got several stores, like 2001 and 1 Hair Studio, Adeline Nails and Spa, Aqua Salon, Muah Beauty, the Braiding Store and Just Incredible: There are so many stores that are worried, small businesses—and not businesses, so let's move away from that—families who have created small businesses to bring culture and heritage and vibrancy to St. Paul's, who are now struggling to make ends meet, who are at food banks in some cases, who are moving out. The reality is, if we don't get transit right, we're going to lose a lot of really amazing folks, not only in St. Paul's but anywhere that is negatively impacted by the Eglinton Crosstown.

Just to say it on record, we did have several fantastic folks who came to visit us from various Yonge-Eglinton residents' associations last week. I actually wrote a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Minister Clark. I'm hoping he will respond to our letter because, again, it really does highlight the concerns of folks in St. Paul's with the Eglinton Crosstown construction.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It is now time for one-minute questions and one-minute responses.

Mr. Norman Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to ask a question of the member from Toronto-St. Paul's on Bill 171. It sounded like she was in favour of more transit. She talked about it overflowing with riders, I believe she said. And she talked about the delays on the Eglinton Crosstown and how it's taking too long. Yet this bill, Bill 171, with all three levels of government agreeing on the plan, is about expediting the building of transit, about building transit faster. It doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. I guess I would ask the member: Why is the NDP against expediting and building transit faster?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very much, member across, for your question. There's no confusion on my side. The NDP, myself as MPP and St. Paul's absolutely do want transit. We want transit that is built responsibly. We want transit that is built in consultation with our communities. And frankly, we want transit that allows municipalities to have a voice at the table as well. The municipalities do not have a voice at the table right now to the full extent that this government would claim.

1650

So I actually reject the premise of your statement that you have support from governments of all levels, because that's not exactly the case. If that were the case, you wouldn't have municipalities demanding compensation for businesses.

While I have enjoyed hearing the government talk about how sorry they are because of all the construction on the Eglinton Crosstown, open the wallet and start helping us support these small businesses that we're losing along the Eglinton Crosstown, and the families that are being impacted.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the member from Toronto-St. Paul's for putting an equity lens on transit here in the province of Ontario, and Toronto specifically. She mentioned that access to transit impacts health and employment opportunities and social inclusion, that it can contribute to isolation, and that that connects to ridership. I'm sure she'll know that Metrolinx is going to be seeing a reduction in its operation subsidy to zero, which will impact the cost of transit.

What does she have to say to the government around making transit affordable for ridership to ensure that everyone can benefit from a public investment in transit?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very much for your question. I think when we're talking about making transit affordable, we have to make transit affordable to all riders, and that means looking at fares and looking at the increase in fares that makes it very difficult for riders to get from point A to B; and in particular for riders who may have lower-income situations and riders who are on fixed incomes. These are riders who we have to actually centre in the conversation because we do want people to be able to get from point A to B.

Currently, this plan that is simply extending delays and extending delays—I mean, 2022. The bill is called making transit faster or whatever the heck it's called, but the reality is that it's delayed for two years. So the contradiction, contrary to what the government has to say, is on their side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The Associate Minister of Energy.

Hon. Bill Walker: I want to wade into this a little bit.

It's interesting. I know that this member wasn't here for the last number of years when the NDP supported the Liberals at every opportunity, created a \$13-billion deficit and a \$359-billion debt. They continually stand across there and challenge us on things we haven't done, yet for the eight years when I was here, they supported the Liberals, who were the worst government, probably, in history when it comes to the annals, and want to continue to challenge us.

This member, as my colleague from Parry Sound just said, has been complaining that it's not being done fast enough. But now we have a plan. We have all four levels of government, who want to move. I believe that public transit will help everyone across the spectrum, yet now we're going too fast. So I would ask this member, for once in this House, if she would just pick one track, stick with it and put some facts there and tell us why she's so mad at us, trying to help the lives of all the people in her riding and across the GTA.

Ms. Jill Andrew: Well, I would like to assume that you're not insinuating that I'm an angry Black woman, because I am not angry. I'm not mad. I'm simply passionate about the issue at hand.

I am passionate about the issue at hand because fast construction that is not well thought out actually costs lives. Evangeline was a constituent of ours until September of last year, when she was killed by a cement truck.

What I'm trying to say—I'm not blaming the government for killing a constituent. Please don't say that. That's not what I'm saying. What I am saying is that if construction was done in a mindful, responsible way, if construction was done with plans for sidewalk use and plans for pedestrians, maybe the outcome would have been different.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker. This government—bless them—likes to pride themselves on saving money for the taxpayer. That would be a fair statement. But I'd have to say that it doesn't apply when they construct things. Example, which was mentioned by them: the Hamilton LRT. The bottom line is that they spent \$160 million expropriating properties, closing down businesses, closing down residential homes and affordable housing areas. Now we're stuck with all these empty properties along the whole line in Hamilton.

I hope when they construct these lines in Toronto that they are not going to be in charge of expropriations and rental properties and people that need housing, because they blew it in Hamilton. Are you concerned about what's going to happen to the people in your area? Because I'm certainly concerned.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I am very concerned. Right now, we are facing a housing crisis in St. Paul's, which we are facing across Ontario. What we've seen with every bill that this government has put forth under the guise of more homes, more this, more that, is we're actually seeing less options. In St. Paul's, we are seeing rent control—poof, gone. It doesn't exist. We are seeing senior citizens—I am serving grandmas and grandfathers in Out of the Cold. I'm serving five-year-olds in my riding who are homeless.

It's interesting that while I'm sharing this very intimate reality of some of the most vulnerable people, people on the other side of the government are chatting and they're laughing. Do you know why? Because it's not their reality, and it probably never was or never will be. I'm actually happy for that, because I wouldn't want any of you to be standing in Out of the Cold, homeless with your five-year-old, feeding them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mrs. Nina Tangri: I think everyone in this House can agree that commute times are getting much longer, and people getting to work and trying to get home from work—it's taking time away from families. This act allows us to get these lines built much faster, to get transit built much faster, so people don't have to leave at the crack of dawn to get to work, so they can get home in time for dinner. That's what this is all about.

I'm interested in understanding and hearing what she's actually hearing from her constituents about commute times and how they want to get to work faster, how they want to not have to leave their children at 5, 6, or 7 in the morning before they go to work. I'm really interested to hear about individuals, on how they commute to work each day.

Ms. Jill Andrew: That is actually a great question. What I would suggest is for you to join me, member of the Conservative government, and come to my constituency office at 803 St. Clair West, right at St. Clair West and Atlas, and let's talk. I can gather for you constituents who have come into our office because of transportation delays, because of renovations, because they can't find housing, because their scooter can't go up the sidewalk at Yonge and Eglinton because there is snow, because there's this, because there's that. You can actually—my apologies, Speaker; I should be speaking through you.

The government can come any time they want to St. Paul's. I only ask that they don't come unannounced, because when the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the member from Eglinton–Lawrence came to Yonge and Eglinton to so-called look at the construction, they didn't invite the local MPP. They—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. It's now time for further debate.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Today, I have the opportunity to speak on a bill that will get Ontario moving faster. Mr. Speaker, Bill 171, the Building Transit Faster Act, is a great piece of legislation, and I will tell you why. But first, I want to thank the transportation minister, the associate minister, and the parliamentary assistant, who is actually sitting beside me here, for the excellent work they have put into this bill—great job, great job.

I'm proud to say our government is working hard for the people of this province by modernizing our transportation system and helping Ontarians get where they need to go. In June of 2018, the people of Ontario voted overwhelmingly for a government committed to getting the province moving. Each year, we lose billions of dollars due to gridlock. To be specific, as a result of congestion, we know the GTA loses \$11 billion in productivity each year. The delays add \$400 million to the cost of goods and have a detrimental impact on our government. The minister and her team, along with our government, will finally put an end to this problem and provide the necessary relief for commuters.

1700

I hear many stories of friends, family and my team members saying the same thing: Our transit system needs to modernize, and our government needs to address the challenges that commuters face on a daily basis. There is just too much congestion and gridlock. But our government is changing that. We do not want to see any more delays. That's why the acceleration of this subway plan is crucial, and Bill 171 will get Ontario moving. I want everyone to know that our plan to deliver a better and faster transit system can soon be a reality.

Our government is committed to partnering with the city of Toronto to remove red tape roadblocks. We are engaging with local residents and businesses on each project. We are consulting with Indigenous communities to ensure Aboriginal and treaty rights and interests are considered in the process. We are making public transit an attractive, affordable and stress-free alternative to get people where they want to go, when they want to get there.

We are finally delivering a transit system for the 21st century. It will be faster for the benefit of the people within the province.

This bill is a response to our government's promise to deliver transit on time and on budget. We can all agree and recognize in this House the increasing demand for safe and reliable transportation options. To improve and protect our environment, it is crucial that our province has a reliable and working transit system that will get Ontarians where they need to be.

The Building Transit Faster Act would provide Ontario with the tools to expedite the planning, design and construction process that has delayed major projects in the past. If passed, the legislation will remove roadblocks and give the province the ability needed to deliver projects faster by:

- relocating utilities more efficiently, while treating businesses fairly and ensuring costs are not passed on to Ontarians;

- ensuring the assembly of land required to construct stations, conduct tunnelling and prepare sites, while treating property owners fairly;

- ensuring timely access to municipal services and rights-of-way;

- allowing Ontario to inspect and remove physical barriers, with appropriate notification to property owners; and

- ensuring nearby developments or construction projects are coordinated so they do not delay the four priority subway projects.

This new legislation will give the tools needed to make sure that our four priority transit projects—the brand new Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway extension, the three-stop Scarborough subway extension and the Eglinton Crosstown West extension—are all built on time. This bill will give Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario the tools they need to make sure these projects are built with the utmost consideration for Ontarians and their time. This legislation includes steps to make the relocation of utilities, such as gas or electrical, more efficient by requiring their infrastructure to be moved within a set time frame, and introduces a structured and consistent process for engaging and coordinating work.

Bill 171 shows our government's commitment to delivering transit faster for the people in the greater Toronto area by reducing congestion and connecting people to places and jobs. Bill 171 aims to address the increasing demand for safe and reliable transportation options.

Mr. Speaker, for my friends opposite who might oppose, I would like to say that, last fall, Toronto city council endorsed our subway plan with an overwhelming vote of 22 to 3. In addition, only one member of council voted against a motion to accelerate the delivery of transit expansion in Toronto.

As I stated earlier, the legislation will provide the tools needed to get our four priority subway projects built on time. These provisions will only apply to the four mentioned projects as of now. I would like to repeat this

sentence again, Mr. Speaker. These provisions will only apply to the four mentioned projects as of now.

Our proposed legislation will include the ability for authorized persons to enter property for specified purposes, subject to notification and other requirements; a provision for stronger coordination of utility relocations within prescribed time frames; and an exemption of lands assembled for the four priority subway projects from the formal hearings process under the Expropriations Act. It will give the minister the ability to issue an order outlining conditions under which Metrolinx could use or modify municipal assets—for example, roadways, municipal services etc. It will include provisions to require development and construction activities within a defined buffer zone of the subway corridor; to obtain a permit in order to proceed; and enforcement authority. Accelerating transit delivery is part of our government's plan to build new transit faster so people can get where they want to go when they want to get there.

I want to talk about the Ontario Line. I know that it is a big one and that it will help many Ontarians in the GTA. Mr. Speaker, look at what's happening in our province and the GTA today. Thousands of people are waiting and there are countless TTC delays. Through the Ontario Line, we can help end the congestion. This line will provide relief to the current overburdened line. We see that there is a need for this relief line. Bill 171 is an ample tool that is required for modernization. Bill 171 will be the tool to do just that.

To deliver our plan within the committed timelines, this bill is needed. Again, I truly appreciate all the great work our ministry is doing to make sure that this bill is confirmed and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. It's now time for questions and responses.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member opposite for his comments. I guess the question that still remains for us is the issue of Metrolinx. The Auditor General identified that the Minister of Transportation influenced Metrolinx's decision-making process leading up to the selection of two stations. The member referenced the importance of station location, and yet you have not addressed some of the core issues of how these decisions are made—the politics. In fact, the Ontario Construction Secretariat, aside from being concerned about recruiting skilled workers—34% of their members said that provincial politics and interference is one of those major issues.

I guess my question to the member opposite is: Why does Bill 171 not double down on accountability and transparency around transit decisions?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to answer the question with a personal example here. For the Mississauga LRT project right now, Metrolinx is holding consultations and having conversations with stakeholders on that LRT line. As I was having conversations with my colleagues over here, as well. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, we are consulting with key stakeholders out there, because, as

a government, we believe in listening and hearing and we believe that whatever projects—this project of Bill 171 and future projects—should be done in consultation with the individuals who are the businesses or the stakeholders who are affected. So I'm sure the member will understand that we will, together—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Question?

1710

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I would like to thank the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville for his passion for transit, and for his attention to the priority of transit in the GTA. I wanted to give the member an opportunity to correct some of the statements that are being made by the members of the opposition with respect to how we're not working with our municipal and federal partners or not working with utilities or companies at all. We've heard that yesterday. We've heard that today. If you could please maybe elaborate a little bit on the historical gains we've made and how we finally have all levels of government working together to build this project.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. As I said during my speech, this is history in the making that, for a project of such mass building infrastructure, we have all levels of government who are committed and governments who are working together. I mean, Mr. Speaker, as I said, when this resolution went into council, 22 to 3 was the outcome, which means that the city also understands the importance of this project. Our Premier, the minister and my colleagues over here with the ministry are doing an incredible job by positioning this project with the priority to make even the federal government understand—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Question?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: So the question that I want to hone in on is that I want a response to the fact that the government has a trust deficit that it's dealing with. Both residents of my riding, who are fed to the teeth with the way that Metrolinx has been dealing with them with the GO expansion, and the folks who are in the neighbouring riding of Toronto–Danforth are beside themselves with a lack of trust at the way that Metrolinx and this government proceeds. Obviously, that has to do with a whole host of other issues, but it has to do with transit specifically.

So I want to know, when people—I was at a Ralph Thornton Community Centre discussion with Metrolinx about the downtown line, and people are beside themselves. The anger was palpable. How are you going to deal with the trust deficit?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, Metrolinx is involved in the LRT project in Mississauga. I can confidently say to the member, because I've seen it first-hand, how engaged Metrolinx is in the LRT project. They are hosting town halls. They have a community office in my riding. It's the Hurontario LRT, and they are opening community offices on the Hurontario road throughout wherever the project or the stops are

going to be to make sure they educate the people of Mississauga but also the stakeholders. I have attended two of their town hall meetings, and I can actually just walk into their office whenever I want if I have any questions—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville for your presentation on the bill. Before, we were listening to the member opposite, and I could see that they're actually in favour of the subway as well. Everyone feels there is an urgency for the transit, and gridlock affects all of us—we know that—directly or indirectly. But, member, you're not from Toronto, but you're from the GTA. What are your residents talking about? What are the benefits they're going to get out of this—doing it faster?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member for the question. The member is right; absolutely. I am from Mississauga, Mr. Speaker. But earlier, my colleague the member from Oakville mentioned how he takes the GO train and then he takes the subway to come to Queen's Park. I have done that many times, on many occasions, where I have experienced the congestion on the TTC line.

I think that projects like these are going to help us ease that congestion and make sure that we make life easy for the people of this province. That's why the people of this province have elected us, Mr. Speaker: because they know that we are going to get the job done.

I am so proud of the minister and my colleagues here, who have taken the initiative that we have to build transit and we have to build transit now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is for the member. As you know, I've had some history on councils. Any major project in any city or anywhere always has overruns or hidden costs. What local councils do is, they have contingency funds and performance bonds. I'm not quite sure I saw any description of that. These projects, obviously, can overrun. They have to take into consideration delays. With anything I've ever been involved in, there are always delays. I don't see anything in this bill that's going to have supplementary funding or performance bonds to be on time for these projects. Has this government taken into consideration those types of things? I guarantee you that those things are going to happen, and if the money is not there, it's going to fall on the local taxpayers, not so much the province—or either one.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our plan will get these four subways built quicker and at a lower cost than what has been done in the past.

To the member opposite, our government is committed to doing things differently, and we understand what needs to be done to get shovels in the ground. Our plan will address the key challenges we face when trying to get transit built.

As I said, I can go back to the Mississauga example, that we work together when we have some challenges and we try to overcome those challenges together—working

together, not working independently but in collaboration with all of the partners, all of the key stakeholders involved.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It is now time for further debate. I turn to the member from Humber River–Black Creek.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you very much, Speaker. *Applause.*

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for the applause.

I rise today proudly in the Legislature to speak about the need for public transit. This is something we all agree with in the chamber, I'm sure. Certainly, the New Democrats do. However, how we get there—proper planning and proper transit—is where we differ.

We have a government that believes in things like environmental assessments as a waste of time. We have an opposition that believes in things like strong planning and real collaboration.

What we are concerned with here is not about building transit and building transit rapidly. Our concern is with the oversight and management of this government, because they have, at every turn, disappointed Ontarians. That's what the key issue is here.

Before I talk a little bit about that, I would like to talk about my own personal experiences growing up in the suburbs, where a new subway line was opened recently. Growing up in Humber River–Black Creek, the rest of the city felt far away. As a child of the suburbs of North York in the 1980s, most of my life existed within a few square kilometres. Often, I would find the right spot in our community to gaze at the CN Tower. It felt as far away as the moon.

My mother would take me to Ontario Place in the summer. We would get on the subway at Wilson and stand at the front of the train, looking down the dark tunnel beginning at Eglinton, waiting for the light at the next station. For me, getting out of the station downtown was like entering another world, a place full of sounds and smells and lots and lots of people, with towering buildings everywhere.

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When most of the subdivisions in Humber River–Black Creek were built in the 1960s, Line 1 of our subway system came only as far north as the current Eglinton station on Yonge Street. From there, it headed south to Union Station on Front before looping north to St. George station on Bloor. In the 1970s, downtown inched closer to us through the openings of Finch station under Yonge Street in 1974 and Wilson station at Allen in 1978. It was another 18 years before the futuristic-looking Downsview station, now called Sheppard West, opened its doors in 1996. That was under the NDP.

Throughout the years, new bus routes were created through our community and more buses were added to the system. Today, when I groan at a 15-minute wait for a local bus, I often forget what it was like in my teenage years, when an hour bus wait was not uncommon.

The plan to bring the subway through our community became a reality after I began working with Councillor

Anthony Perruzza at city hall in my former work. That news was like a dream come true. Contracts were awarded in 2008. Associated infrastructure work, moving sewers, began later that year. Drilling commenced in 2011 and was completed in 2013. Throughout the construction, my work afforded me the great privilege to be part of this incredible project. Prior to construction, important consultations about everything from station design to traffic patterns, meetings with engineers, tours of tunnels and stations at various stages of construction, and much more happened. This stuff is important.

On December 16, we held a special open house at Finch West station, where members of our community explored the station. The feeling of excitement was palpable.

On December 17, the new subway line to our community and into Vaughan opened. On that day, we truly became one with the rest of our city and beyond, as thousands upon thousands rode for free and stared in absolute wonder at a new subway line through our community. We shared in that excitement.

For me, the most memorable day wasn't that free ride on Sunday; it was Monday, because I could actually walk to a subway station. That was something I couldn't imagine, growing up. It was a day when my life and the life of my community got better, and I remember my smile lasting the entire ride to Queen Street.

Transit fully transforms communities, but major projects take time, and they take guts to build. The subway to Vaughan was a decades-old idea held by many and originally envisioned just to go to York University. With the amount of money required, multiple levels of government get involved and the locations can be contentious. Yes, politics gets involved since, of course, decisions to build transit are made by politicians.

Having worked at city hall, I'd like to remind people here to consider the ambitious and prudent Transit City project unveiled under former Toronto mayor David Miller and TTC chair Adam Giambrone. That plan aimed to ease congestion through transit relief across the entire city. We had LRT lines including Waterfront West; Jane; Finch West; Sheppard East to Durham; Eglinton-Crosstown, which would have gone all the way out to the airport at the time; Scarborough-Malvern; and Don Mills to York region. And it would have added new bus rapid transit lines and extended the Scarborough RT. Part of that planning was to provide transit access to low-income communities so that they would have the same opportunities that others have in the city.

That plan was determined in heavy and thoughtful consultation with transit experts. That plan was ripped to shreds by the political administration that followed Mayor David Miller. Guess what? The Premier was a part of that administration.

So I find it rather rich when this government complains about delays in transit in Toronto, amongst other things, because they—their ideas, the people of their party—tore up a real plan for all of Toronto and they did it for dogma.

The NDP is building more public transit in the GTA—in fact, we're speeding up construction of public transit, as well.

The problem is that I don't believe that this bill will achieve its professed goal of preventing delays. Like so many Tory bills and stuff we end up debating here—what is this really about? It's called the Building Transit Faster Act. This is so that government members can send out newsletters to their constituencies and talk about building faster transit. I don't believe that's what this achieves.

You see, the government complains that delays in the construction of the Eglinton Crosstown line are a major reason behind the necessity for this bill.

Of course—and we heard it again today, and we heard it so many times—Mike Harris and the Conservatives buried a huge hole on Eglinton, a huge infrastructure transit plan, many years ago. In fact, urban legend has it that if you dig along Eglinton, you'll find cash in the ground that the Conservatives threw there to cover it.

It's rich when we hear Conservatives talk about transit. It's rich when we hear Conservatives who cancelled the LRT in Hamilton talk about transit relief.

You see, this is a government that governs on dogma. This is what it's about. We, as New Democrats, listen to experts, we collaborate, and when we make plans, they're prudent. Tory and Liberal planning along transit infrastructure—and I've heard the complaints. You call up your wealthy landowner donors and say, "Where have you got land? Here? Here? Here? Okay. We'll make that work." That's not how New Democrats plan transit.

Now, what has happened in our community where we have the Finch West LRT that was under construction—and I have to say that the in opinion of constituents in my community, they were very concerned when this Conservative government was elected because they thought that plan would be in jeopardy, that the Finch West LRT itself would have been in jeopardy because of what the Premier, then part of the former administration in the city of Toronto, did with the Transit City plans. I received calls and people were saying, "Please protect this major infrastructure project in our constituency."

That plan was actually shortchanged by the former Liberal government because the Finch West LRT was supposed to go all the way to Yonge Street, but what the Liberal government of the time did was use the debate that was occurring at city hall to delay and delay and delay transit funding in the city of Toronto. That's what the Liberals did, and they actually cut back the scope of the Finch West LRT plan in my constituency, which links my riding and the Premier's riding, since we are neighbours.

Another concerning thing was the FOI obtained by the Toronto Star that showed that the whole plan for the Ontario Line came from one individual. Again, these are stories that bring up red flags for the opposition because we know that this government has taken a lot of decision and direction along dogma. I know we've heard a lot of stuff about stickers being ripped off, but these are important things to consider. This was partisan involvement in a federal election campaign to force gas station attendants to post stickers to talk about gas taxation, and they pushed on this for political and dogmatic reasons and they all started ripping off. That was a mess.

Yes, I know we're hearing a lot in the news about these licence plates and we all know that the colour blue was chosen because, guess what?—that's the Tory colour. Now, they're going to have to fix that. They say they're fixing that plan, but if they don't get major infrastructure and transit projects right—this isn't about peeling stickers or fixing licence plates—we're talking about millions and millions and millions of dollars of damage that has to be fixed.

I'm urging this government: Don't shortchange environmental assessment projects. I know this government doesn't really take things like environmental assessments very seriously, but getting your plans right in the front end is important. I can tell you that with my experience working for a city councillor and dealing with transit projects, the delays on the transit projects along the subway didn't happen on the front end. Most of those things happened once construction began—contractual disputes and other things. I think the government needs to get their facts straight.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It's now time for questions and responses.

Hon. Bill Walker: It's always a pleasure to stand and debate with my good friend, the member from Humber River–Black Creek. He brought a lot of good thought processes there. I'm just going to ask a couple of little things. He was talking a lot about our inability to plan, and I asked one of his colleagues yesterday—and he was new to this, so it probably wasn't all him. But at the end of the day, the NDP platform had a \$7-billion hole in it, so I'm not certain how good that planning was. They will throw back and say, "But we had a plan." And how did that work out? We did okay, I think, without having a full, detailed plan, but we didn't have a \$7-billion hole in it, Mr. Speaker.

He's saying again about delays. He wants to help people, he wants to get people moving and he wants the people in his riding to have better services. Why, then, won't he support it? Just because it's a Conservative plan doesn't mean it can't be a good plan. I would hope he's the type of guy, typically, as a critic of mine when I was in a former portfolio, who would work with me. So here I would like him to do the same thing and put the people first and say, "We want to help you." We're going to actually help speed up development and transit to help the people in his great riding.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I can assure the minister that I'm always here to help the people of Ontario. I can assure the minister that I'm always here to help the people of Humber River–Black Creek, my lifelong home.

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I want to remind the minister that his boss was part of an administration that tore up a well-thought-out plan that would have seen transit access delivered to the entirety of the city of Toronto. I hope that in his caucus meetings he and other members ask the hard questions to ensure the planning that is made by this government is prudent and will actually deliver real change for Ontarians, because the concern I hear is that their interest really is to help their

wealthy donors and not the people of Ontario. Although on a personal level, I do have to say that I do consider this minister a friend, his government—I don't know if I agree with a lot of what they're doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Mr. Paul Miller: I would have to say to the member from Black Creek: good presentation. I will tell you right now, you should be worried about cost overruns, because it's going to happen, guaranteed. I don't know how any member over there can stand up and say, before the project has even started, "We're going to come under budget. It's all going to be there. It's not going to cost the taxpayers any money." Nonsense. It's going to cost them more money. You won't admit it.

But if it does cost more money, you have an out, like you did in Hamilton. You will say, "Oh, when we started this thing in Hamilton, the LRT, it was going to be \$1.5 billion or \$2 billion." And when the government decided to cancel the project, all of a sudden it was going to cost \$5 billion. So they are good at cancelling things, inflating costs so when they say they want to cancel something, they can put it somewhere else.

Trust me: Get ready for some overruns in cost. They're going to come back and say, "Well, we didn't expect that. We didn't know that was going to happen." It will.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I echo the concerns of my good friend and colleague. Cost overruns are not unheard of in major projects. It occurs. I hope that this government will have the guts, if they're going to proceed on transit plans, to do the right thing, to stand up to contractors when they're taking Ontarians for a ride. I don't have a lot of confidence in this government because I haven't seen them take the side of regular Ontarians much, but I guess time will tell.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: As somebody who was involved with municipal government, I've seen a lot of projects over the years. One of the biggest problems we have is trying to get the original planning and layouts done. This is what this bill does. It allows them to go in and it allows them to get planning and to get that planning and those cost expectations in line before the project is under way. We have seen great delays in all our transit across this whole province, especially in Toronto, and this bill is geared toward fixing those problems, getting transit. We hear from members opposite how it's so important to get transit to their people. Well, then you are going to want this bill to pass so you can expedite it.

We've seen some of the problems of the past. We've seen Toronto falling behind in transit. So what's your plan? We haven't heard your plan. What is your plan?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This plan just allows government members to send newsletters to their community to tell them they are building transit faster. That's all it does. This plan just says, "Environmental assessments are not important. In fact, start construction. Figure out the assessments later." This plan can lead to a lot of money and headache issues while you are trying to fix messes that

you are creating. That's what this plan is about. This plan isn't about speeding up transit. This is just another government tag line so they can tell people they are moving on things. That's what it's about.

This plan includes things like property owners losing the right to compensation if they hinder, obstruct or interfere with an obstruction removal. What about a situation where there is an unreasonable situation where things are being taken away from their own personal property? "Oh, you disagree? Forget about it. We're not going to listen to you. We're just going to tear it out." That's what this government wants to do.

Those are absolutely things that this government should be considering. This doesn't speed up transit. This is just a tag line, like everything else the government does.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the member for Humber River–Black Creek: As he mentioned in his comments, the issue around expropriations in the new process is supposed to speed up transit. However, limiting the right to a hearing of necessity is a huge issue for us. If the government wants to take land, they can, but the government is changing the way that a landowner can appeal that decision, leaving much of it up to regulation. In fact, so much of this bill is left up to regulation that you, I think, are creating more red tape, which is something of an irony.

Do you think, to the member of Humber River–Black Creek, that this government is truly streamlining the process or are they just steamrolling over the process?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: I don't know if this province has ever seen a government specializing in heavy-handed legislation and steamrolling like we have seen in this government. That's what we have. It does not surprise me that this government is taking a heavy-handed approach when—think about people who could be in your own constituencies who are facing potential expropriations because lines were drawn that might be disputed as to what was taken.

I hope this government pays absolute attention, but when it comes to steamrolling, heavy-handed legislation and bullying, this government gets the gold medal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Thank you to the member from Humber River–Black Creek. I really enjoyed listening to you reminiscing about your past. It was similar to mine about the subway stories, but as I have 60 seconds, I won't put that on the record. But we can talk about it after.

I do share your frustration in the House here when it comes to our archaic subway system and transportation. The Liberals had 15 years to do something; they did nothing. They did nothing during that time; they had 15 years. We've put through legislation to get things done not only quickly but at a good price. In the essence of time here, I will repeat my colleague's question: What is the NDP plan? What is your plan?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Thank you for the questions. The NDP plan: We support the Hamilton LRT; this government ripped it up. We support the Yonge extension. We

support the downtown relief line. We support extending the Eglinton LRT eventually out to the airport, like was originally envisioned. We support matching funds to municipalities. We respect municipalities' abilities for self-determination. We support funding transit. That's what the NDP plan is. Our plan isn't heavy-handed. We care about what experts in transit have to say. We care about what communities have to say. The NDP is the transit party.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Jill Andrew: Thank you very, very much to our member for that passionate summarization of exactly what the NDP's platform on transit and on supporting Ontarians really is.

I'm wondering if you have had any really riveting responses from your constituents around delays with transit, congestion, getting to work or to school on time that you might be able to share with this government that we know are not going to be solved by Bill 171. The question came to me as I was looking at my cellphone because the government had asked, "Tell me about your constituents," and there are 25 letters just for today from people who are saying, "Yeah, fast is good, but fast has to be really good in order for it to help us, because it's currently not." Any local stories?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Absolutely. My constituency, like many constituencies in Toronto, is facing a lot of gridlock. The idea that the Conservative government of the past made the 407 a pay-as-you-go highway is something that I still, to this day—if you want to talk about stories here, the frustrations. Many constituents in my constituency are forced to drive because they don't have transit options, especially on the west side of my riding. That is something that we hear every day about—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. It's time now for further debate.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It's always an honour to talk about transit, one of the most important issues in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, and it is a pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 171, the Building Transit Faster Act. This act could be one of the most exciting acts that we pass this term, although the PAWS Act was pretty exciting.

Building transit is what this government campaigned on and it is a promise we will deliver to the people of Toronto. Our transit system has been neglected for far too long and now it's time for action. As a representative of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I see every day what congestion is costing our families and our economy. I know my colleague the Minister of Transportation has pointed out that as a result of congestion, the GTA loses approximately \$11 billion per year in productivity, and congestion adds \$400 million to the cost of goods.

Congestion also has an impact on our environment—
Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Government members, your member is speaking. Your member has the floor.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Our government is committed to the significant investment of \$28.5 billion in new transit construction in the city of Toronto. This is by far the largest investment in transit history.

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My colleague the Minister of Transportation has said that we need to make public transit a more attractive, affordable and low-stress alternative to get people where they want to go, when they want to get there. Bill 171, if passed, will give the province the ability to build the four priority transit projects in the city of Toronto without delay—and those are key words, "without delay." These are the Ontario Line, the Yonge North subway extension, the three-stop Scarborough subway extension and the Eglinton West Crosstown extension. This bill, if passed, will give Ontario and Metrolinx the tools that they need to make sure that these projects are built on time.

Mr. Speaker, just last fall, Toronto city council endorsed our subway plan with an overwhelming majority. They also passed a motion with only one member opposing that motion, and they asked us, the government of Ontario, to make sure we speed up the delivery of transit expansion in the city of Toronto. It's been far too long.

I believe that our subway plan is realistic. I believe that our subway plan is attainable and that it is deliverable. It will bring subway infrastructure to new neighbourhoods across Toronto, Markham and Richmond Hill.

We know that our residents have waited far too long to see transit expanded in the city of Toronto. Years and years of delay have caused frustration to grow and congestion to continue, and it just keeps getting worse. The government needs to act now. Our government is acting now, and it is committed to working with the city of Toronto and the TTC to get shovels in the ground, to lay the tracks, to buy the trains and to deliver more transit to more people, all with accelerated timelines.

These projects and timelines are ambitious—yes, they are—but we really cannot afford to wait. By 2030, there will be over one million more people in the greater Toronto area, bringing the total population to over eight million. By 2045, that number is expected to hit 10 million.

Mr. Speaker, Etobicoke–Lakeshore, my riding, is becoming one of the most densely populated parts of the city, and many people don't realize that. The community of Humber Bay Shores is home to approximately 28,000 people right now, with growth projections to go up. This is all in the southeast corner of my riding, a very small section of my riding.

What I hear from them every single day is that we need more transit; we need to get moving. This is why I continue to advocate for a GO station at Parklawn, because that is something that our government does need, but this transit will help. On the Lakeshore West line, the Ontario Line will connect to my riding to allow those commuters to get off and get onto a relief line, which will save them time—time so they can get home to their children, to their families or their extracurricular activities.

Adding capacity to our transit system is important for the whole city. Although Etobicoke–Lakeshore is my priority, our whole government has—I guess all of our ridings are important to each and every one of us, so we all have our areas we want to make sure have transit lines.

Members of the opposition, I'm sure your constituents are asking for more transit as you stand on the line, waiting to get to work in the morning, and more importantly, waiting to get home at night.

Adding capacity to our transit system, including the Yonge-University line—as our population is growing, our transit is just going to get worse. Commuters are the ones who are paying the price because past governments have failed to build transit. They have failed.

Our bold subway plan will deliver results for the city of Toronto. If passed, the Building Transit Faster Act will cut bureaucratic red tape and break down the silos that have held up projects in the past. It will help us meet our ambitious timelines for our priority subway projects and deliver the transit network that people so desperately need and are asking for.

The Ontario Line could be delivered as early as 2027, which will bring rapid transit to neighbourhoods such as Liberty Village and Flemingdon Park and will also help address the dangerous overcrowding on the TTC's Line 1 and at Bloor-Yonge station. I know that many people here actually do take transit to work, and they've been stuck at the Bloor-Yonge station. Sometimes you have to wait for three, four and five trains to go through before you can even get on.

After so many years of discussion and debate with my friend here next to me, the Scarborough subway extension—the people of Scarborough have waited long enough, and we plan to deliver that Scarborough subway before 2029-30. It will finally extend Line 2 further into Scarborough. Why should the people of Scarborough be left without? They have been waiting for so long.

Finally, the Eglinton Crosstown West extension will be delivered by 2030-31. This will improve the connectivity along Eglinton West and enable future access to Pearson airport, helping make Pearson airport a true transportation hub. It is quite surprising that we have a world-class city in Toronto and no immediate connection. If you travel around the world, most world-class cities have that connection. Toronto is behind.

Building more transit and shortening commutes have a positive benefit for all of our communities. In the GTA today, the average commute to and from work is approximately 48 minutes. Some will say it's more, some will say it's less, and some will say it's a lot more, depending on the hour you leave. Not only is this a significant inconvenience to our daily lives, but it also has a cost to our province and that cost is in a great deal of lost productivity. That's money. That's our economy. That's getting Ontario moving. That's getting our goods from A to B. That's getting people to work, from home. That's getting our food to our grocery stores. We have the food terminal in my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, and you see the trucks, and you see them stuck in transit all the way. They're stuck in traffic just to get in and unload their goods. All of that is a cost on society.

So what will this bill do? Since Premier Ford first unveiled our government's historic \$28.5-billion subway expansion plan this spring, cross-government work has

been under way to identify steps in the planning and construction processes where we can speed things up, because we knew it wasn't enough just to plan the new lines; we needed to rethink the entire process if we were going to be successful. The legislation we're discussing today is about the hard work that was discussed over the last couple of months.

Like Minister Mulroney said, we should take a moment to recognize all of the staff at the Ministry of Transportation and all of the other ministries who are involved in bringing this legislation forward.

I also want to thank my colleague to the north, Minister Surma, for her hard work and dedication with regard to this file and her advocacy for an Eglinton Crosstown across the top of Etobicoke.

I know that there has been a lot of collaboration with Metrolinx and with Infrastructure Ontario as well as engagement with the city of Toronto and York region. A lot of work and time and energy has gone into this, and we've identified several key challenges that we have faced in the past and opportunities for acceleration.

Mr. Speaker, this is an excellent piece of legislation. I am pleased to speak about it. I will be happy to answer questions, as I know that this is something our government campaigned on and promised. Now let's just get it done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have time for questions and responses.

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question for the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, a Toronto MPP, was: How does she feel that the Premier, when he was a councillor at the city of Toronto, was instrumental in tearing up the Waterfront LRT and a plan that would have seen the Eglinton LRT extended all the way to the airport, and that if it weren't for him and others who agreed with him, these LRT projects likely would have been completed by now?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I thank the member for the question. I also worked at the city of Toronto when a lot of these items were discussed. Governments change over time, and you can talk about something that happened 10 years ago or 15 years ago, and then you talk about something today.

I'll tell you, this government—this Premier—has made a commitment to the people of Ontario. We have invested \$28.5 billion to get this done. We are working. We are working with the Minister of Transportation. We're working with the people of Metrolinx. But more importantly, we're working with the people of Ontario to make sure we have the right projects in the right locations.

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We need to get moving on this Ontario Line. Your constituents want to see Toronto moving. As I said, if you're ever sitting at the Bloor-Yonge station, one, two, three, four, five, six trains might pass before you get on. That's delayed time getting to work, and that's delayed time getting home to your family, to your kids and home to make dinner.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Flamborough-Glanbrook

Ms. Donna Skelly: Back to the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore: I've had the opportunity to work now in the

Legislature for just under two years. It's obvious that there is huge congestion in the city of Toronto. My colleague from Etobicoke–Lakeshore has lived here for many, many years and works here as well. I would ask her to share with us the congestion issues that you have experienced, that your neighbours and perhaps your own constituents experience every day because of the congestion, and how the proposals put forward in this particular legislation will help address it.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I have to thank the member for that excellent question. It is true: I have lived in Toronto for many, many years. And for the first many years, I didn't even own a car; all I took was transit. Once I bought a car, I went, "Hmm, I actually don't want the car because it's easier to take transit."

One thing is, we do have to make sure our transit is better. We have to make sure it's convenient so people take it. If we can get people out of the car—I'm not saying you don't want to drive the car; people do want to drive cars. But if you don't want to drive the car, let's make transit convenient for them to take. That is an important piece.

In my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, in the bottom section, as I mentioned earlier, it's a growing population. Over the last 10 years, we've had an increase of 28,000 people—with one road—and these people are living with congestion. Unfortunately, the former member allowed this to happen. I just want to say that the people in my riding want to see transit built.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions?

Mr. Paul Miller: My question to the member—you know what? In all our communities we'd like to see transit, too. Apparently, the government says they're for all communities. They've slowed down and stopped the construction of the GO station at Centennial Parkway for the Niagara-Hamilton corridor. They were supposed to build one in Grimsby—stopped. They were supposed to build the loop in Mississauga, the second biggest city in Ontario—not happening.

People are starting to ask questions. Are there two provinces here: the province of the GTA and the rest of us? Because all the money is being spent in Toronto and the GTA, and we're getting Timbits from the doughnut—Timbits. It's ridiculous.

There is so much need for infrastructure in communities like Waterloo, Hamilton, Windsor, and London. They are being ignored. All the money is sinking into Toronto—not acceptable.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you to the member for the question. I think you missed reading the legislation. The legislation is about four projects. These are four projects that we've been talking about, and that's what this legislation covers. We want to make sure they're built on time, built on budget, and get people moving. It's about congestion.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will come to order.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Anyone who lives in Toronto understands congestion.

Mr. Paul Miller: You don't understand anything.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I understand—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation lives in Scarborough. Why should Scarborough be left out? Scarborough has been left out for far too long. We need the people from Scarborough to get to work and we need to get them home to their families at the end of the day.

We have a plan, and it's led by Doug Ford and the Minister of Transportation. We're going to get subways built—

Mr. Paul Miller: Oh, yes, a one-way plan.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: We're going to get subways built on time and on budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will come to order or the next time you'll be warned.

Next question.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I wanted to ask the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore if she could tell us a little bit about the difference between our government's plan to build residential, retail and commercial buildings on top of subway stations versus what the Liberals did in the past, which was stand-alone, very expensive mega subway stations. You did talk about the Liberals' past and what they've done, so if we could just highlight what we're doing to improve and ameliorate.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I want to thank the member for the question. We know why they have six seats: Because over the last 15 years, the Liberals did absolutely nothing. They did absolutely nothing on any file, including the transit file. That is why we are so backlogged and so congested in Toronto.

One of the amazing ideas that this government came forward with was building these transit hubs, and homes on these transit hubs. When you think about it, if people don't want to drive, don't drive. Take transit. But let's make it convenient for them. Let's build these apartments and housing, and some affordable housing, on this transit area so people have a place to live, an affordable place to live, and they don't actually have to buy a car.

We have to get shovels in the ground first to start this project going. It's a great question. I thank you for that. I thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for his initiative and I thank Premier Ford for his plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Question?

Ms. Jill Andrew: My comment is back to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. I hear the government saying consistently, "We just want folks to get home on time." I'm wondering what the government's plans are to create community infrastructures in order to support the thousands and thousands of new people that we're all excited to welcome into all of our ridings.

What's the government's plan around community centres, creating schools, repairing schools? We've got a \$16-billion state of disrepair in our schools. Is the

government thinking of bringing back rent control? Because the reality is you keep saying, “Get home fast,” but a lot of people don’t have homes to go to because they can’t even afford the rent on their apartments.

I’m just wondering what is the government’s social determinants plan around ensuring there are community centres, schools, affordable housing, rent control—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I thank the member opposite for the question. Obviously, she’s on the wrong topic today. This is not the More Homes, More Choice Act that is actually going to bring more housing to the city of Toronto and across Ontario. Today, just to know what we are talking about, we’re actually talking about four transit projects. We’re not talking about what you’re—that act has already passed.

Today, we’re talking about getting transit. We’re talking about getting people moving. We’re talking about getting the city of Toronto finally moving fast, on budget, on time. This is the most important thing we can do for the city of Toronto right now. People are waiting at the subway places. As downtown members on the other side, you must—I’m not sure if you take transit to work; maybe you drive. But if you take the transit—take the transit. Try. Try to get on that Yonge line and see the waiting lines to get on there.

It is far beyond time we get transit moving. We need to get this done today. We need to start getting shovels in the ground today, and you know what? This government will—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

We have time for a very quick question and a very quick answer.

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the member: You talk about getting Toronto moving. We talk about a \$28.5-billion price tag. I represent 110,000 people. We have zero public transit. The subway, obviously, the TTC, does not go down to Port Dover.

Mr. Paul Miller: Your biggest town is 6,000 people.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I hear a heckle from the member from the Hamilton area. That Hamilton Street Railway is a dream. I’ve been using that system since the 1960s. You really have something there with that bus system.

I guess if I count my MPP time, I’ve worked in Toronto for over 30 years now. My gridlock, my commute is inside and out. You’re internal.

I have staff. Sometimes they’re late for work because of this. The best excuse I ever got: “I was riding the street-car and it got a flat tire”—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Although we did have time for a short question and a short response, the member has eaten up all the time on the clock.

Seeing it is close to the time to end this debate, therefore—I know, colleagues, you’re going to be upset at this, but we’re out of time for further debate today.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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