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of Ontario



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Mardi  
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Présidente : L'honorable Donna Skelly  
Greffier : Trevor Day

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# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 27 May 2025

# ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 27 mai 2025

*Report continued from volume A.*

1800

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

### PHARMACARE

**MPP Robin Lennox:** I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should implement universal coverage of prescription medications by expanding eligibility of the Ontario Drug Benefit to provide all Ontarians with equal access to life-saving and cost-saving treatment and preventative health care.

**The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell):** MPP Lennox has moved private members' notice of motion number 2. Pursuant to standing order 100, the member has 12 minutes for their presentation.

**MPP Robin Lennox:** I would like us all to imagine standing at a pharmacy counter, holding a prescription from your doctor and wondering whether or not you'll be able to fill it, having to do a mental calculation about whether you'll be able to both get the antibiotics to treat your pneumonia and have enough money to feed yourself in the same day. Imagine being a worker, contemplating having to go to work in unsafe conditions, but knowing that if you don't, your family member will lose access to the essential medications they need for their chronic illness. These are the impossible choices millions of people are facing across Ontario today in the absence of a universal pharmacare program.

Currently, one in five working Ontarians do not have access to any prescription medication coverage. Lack of prescription medication access is also disproportionately higher among immigrant and racialized workers and young entry-level workers, who are more likely to work part-time or have precarious employment. As a result, we see many people in our communities who are not receiving the appropriate treatment for the known medical conditions that they have, leading to preventable complications or even death.

I saw this in my own family practice: people who'd be ashamed to say that the reason their blood glucose was far higher than it should be for their diabetes was because they weren't able to afford their prescription medication that month. And I remember trying to scramble around the clinic to find drug samples or apply for compassionate coverage, knowing that even those stopgap solutions would fall through in just a short time.

Medications are one of the essential tools that we have in health care to prevent and treat disease. And just like other forms of health care in our province, access should not be restricted only to those who can afford it but should be available to all who need it. And so, I stand before you today to urge the government to take meaningful action on this issue by expanding access to prescription medications and ensuring that all Ontarians, regardless of age or income status, have access to medications under the Ontario Drug Benefit. Because access to life-saving prescription medications should not depend on your age, your income, or your employment status.

Canada is the only high-income country with universal health care that does not have a requisite fully-funded pharmacare program—the only one. We pay for doctor's visits, emergency department visits, hospital stays, MRIs, blood work, other tests, but not for the medication your health care provider has prescribed to you in order to stay well. It's a gap that not only doesn't make sense, but it negatively impacts the health and well-being of people across Ontario every single day.

Right now, Ontario ranks among the top three provinces with the highest prescription medication deductibles in Canada. Through the Trillium Drug Benefit, Ontarians must spend 4% of their household income on prescription medication before any access to coverage might begin. At a time when rents are skyrocketing, food prices have gone up tremendously, and the cost of living is becoming less and less affordable, this threshold for medication coverage is far too high for too many Ontarians. This financial burden forces many individuals, especially those living with chronic conditions, to navigate complex systems, fight for approvals and, in some cases, forgo their prescription medication altogether.

Currently, Ontario's drug benefit is available to people under the age of 25, over the age of 65, and those on social assistance or in long-term care. For those who have access, it's a fantastic resource that allows them to continue the treatments for their diseases without having to choose between their medications and putting food on the table. But there are far too many people across Ontario who have been left behind with our current Ontario drug benefit. For anyone between 25 and 65 who is working, but perhaps is self-employed or doesn't have access to private benefits, they are forced to make impossible choices.

We know that for many, this choice ends up being to ration or skip doses of their medication because their budget just simply won't allow them to take it every single day. For others, they may never be able to fill their prescription and access the medicines that they need.

Right now, people in Ontario are choosing between groceries and their medication. Workers are having to decide between continuing to work in unsafe working conditions or risk losing their benefits and their family's access to prescription medication. We can do so much better for the people of Ontario.

We talk a lot in this House about only paying for health care with your OHIP card, never your credit card, but somehow we lose that principle between the time it takes for someone to walk from their doctor's office to the pharmacy to fill their prescription. And every year Ontarians are spending millions of dollars out of their own pockets on prescription medication because they lack public or private drug coverage. That's money that isn't going to rent, it's not going to groceries or other essentials, but it's going to something that we should be providing for them.

By expanding Ontario Drug Benefit eligibility to include all Ontarians, we could immediately put that money back in people's pockets while taking better care of their health at a time when they desperately need us to have their backs.

We also know that when people are healthy, they are better able to participate in our workforce, our economy and our communities. At a time of economic uncertainty, expanding access to the Ontario Drug Benefit is one way our government could immediately act to support Ontarians and increase the resilience of our economy and our province in the face of tariffs and trade threats.

Right now, workers across Ontario are afraid of losing their jobs. And while they're afraid of losing their jobs, they're also having to worry about the health benefits that themselves and their families depend on. If we pass this motion and expand access to the Ontario Drug Benefit, all people in Ontario would know that we have their backs in ensuring that they won't lose access to their medication no matter what happens.

We also know that universal pharmacare eases the burden on employers, many of whom are struggling to provide comprehensive drug prices to their employees under the harsh prices of private drug companies. Because private drug companies are so expensive, employers are having to eat into their profit margins, which is something that is particularly negatively impacting small businesses who want to provide for their employees. If the province were to take on responsibility for medication coverage for all Ontarians, employers could redirect those essential resources to focusing on growing their businesses and fortifying their businesses against a potential recession that we now face.

When we talk about a tariff response that puts Ontarians first, ensuring that every person in Ontario has access to their essential medications has to be part of that plan. Implementing universal public drug coverage that is both comprehensive and evidence-based would be the best way to ensure the accessibility and affordability of medication in Ontario. The expansion of pharmacare would lower costs for all Ontarians, as medications could be negotiated through bulk purchases, and the ability to bulk-purchase medication for a public pharmacare program would significantly reduce the overall medication cost that Ontario pays today.

In addition to these cost benefits, expanding prescription medication coverage actually reduces overall health system costs, offsetting overall program costs of a pharmacare program. Estimates have shown that even by expanding prescription medication costs just by an essential medicines list in Ontario, it would cost us an additional \$1.3 billion, but we would save \$2.1 billion on overall health system costs.

Very few other interventions that we could offer actually reduce health care costs while so effectively increasing access to an essential service. And if we choose not to pay for medications at the pharmacy, we're going to pay for it in our emergency departments and in our hospitals, because when we miss opportunities to treat illness early with the right prescription medications, we end up seeing higher rates of hospitalizations, surgeries and other complications that could have been avoided.

We can't afford to let our health system be further strained and we can't afford to let Ontarians become ill and suffer when we could have prevented it by providing access to the medications that they need.

In a randomized controlled trial by Ontario researchers, 786 people across Ontario who could not afford their medications were given free access to their medications for three years. And over those three years, the research showed that, per person, our total health care costs were reduced by \$1,600. Imagine that: We could save money, not with budget cuts or with reducing services, but by actually expanding services, allowing access to essential medications that people need.

#### 1810

Beyond the health care cost-savings, we also know that by moving to a publicly delivered pharmacare program, we would save money that is currently being funnelled into private insurance companies. As one example, 10% of the workforce in Ontario—about 650,000 people—are Ontario public sector employees. All of those employees have access to medication coverage through private benefits paid for by the government of Ontario, and those benefits are delivered through private insurance companies.

But we know that private insurance companies are the most expensive way to offer medication coverage—far more expensive than publicly delivered pharmacare programs. As it stands now, we are actively diverting public money into the private sector to pay for medications for our public workers instead of taking care of Ontario employees ourselves by offering them access to the Ontario drug benefit. We should not be paying private corporations a premium to do our job. We are responsible for delivering health care in this province, and we can do that by expanding pharmacare today.

Expanding prescription medication coverage is not a radical thought. Like I said, Canada is the only high-income country with universal health care that does not have a universal pharmacare system. And, overwhelmingly, Canadians support pharmacare. When we poll them, when we ask them, 86% of Canadians have affirmed that access to publicly funded prescription medication should be expanded. On how many other issues do we have that kind of wide, sweeping support in this province?

This could be a tremendous win for Ontario at a time when people are desperately looking to their government for leadership. Until now, we have not been a leader in health care; we have the lowest per capita spending on health care of any province in Ontario. But we could be a leader here. In doing so, we could show up for Ontarians at a time when they desperately need us to show up. So I ask the government to stand with me today and expand coverage for prescription medication to all Ontarians, ensuring that everyone has access to the treatments that they need at the time that they need them.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**Mr. John Fraser:** I want to congratulate and thank the member on her first private member's motion. It's always hard the first time getting up in this place and doing your first bill. You did a great job, and it's a very important topic. I'm glad you raised it here.

I was part of a government that brought in something called OHIP+, which started the process of universal pharmacare—not as fast as some people wanted, but it provided medications for young people—I think under age 25. It was really a very, I think, critical step in moving forward. It may have been too iterative for some, but there's a way that you can progress and start meeting in the middle, right?

But what happened in 2018 is the government took over and they decided that they were going to change OHIP+. What they did with OHIP+ was make insurance companies the payer of first resort. So if you're covered, you didn't get drugs paid for by OHIP+. Now, OHIP+ also includes 65-plus. And we all know the payer of first resort for 65-plus is the government, not the insurance companies. So I've never quite understood why that change was made.

The other problem right now is—and it's something that's happening in our pharmacies—right now, people who are covered by OHIP+ don't know it. They don't know. And pharmacists, some of them don't know either, because it's been a long period of time and the government hasn't done a lot to promote it. So some people end up paying what they call the barrel price, the highest price for a drug. Instead of the pharmacists offering them the price which the government pays—I mean, which should be free for them—they would get less. So OHIP+ has just been slowly dwindling and getting weaker and weaker every year, because the government's doing nothing to promote it, because it doesn't want to spend the money, because it's not something that was theirs.

And do you know why this is really critical, OHIP+? Right now, children in this province, many of them—young people, youth—are experiencing a lot of anxiety, mental health issues. They require some medication to support them. It's often expensive medication. It would be critical to their well-being to be able to have access to those drugs. And when you don't have access, you're not going to get well. So much of health care is pharmacare.

The last piece I'd like to add in—because I want to leave some time for my colleagues from Don Valley East

and Nepean—is here's why it's important. We just heard—I'm going to talk about it a bit later on tonight—that the government has spent about \$40 million on an ad that says, "It's happening here." But do you know what's not happening here and hasn't been happening here for seven, eight, nine, ten years? Take-home cancer drugs. For some reason, for the last decade, the government has not found a way to make sure that people can get take-home cancer drugs to recover, to get well at home. They're available in other places, but not here in Ontario. The Premier may think that there are a lot of things happening here, and he wanted to spend \$40 million to do it—mostly to win an election—but what's not happening here is access to simple, straightforward medications that help people, like take-home cancer drugs.

And again, I thank the member.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**Ms. Jennifer K. French:** Access to life-saving prescription medication should not depend on your age, income or employment status. Canadians want medications to be covered. Canada is the only high-income country with universal health care that does not have a fully funded pharma care program. We pay for doctor's visits, emergency department visits, hospital stays, MRIs, blood work, and other tests, but not for the medication that health care providers prescribe to people to stay healthy. Expanding access to the Ontario Drug Benefit is one way this government could act today to support Ontarians and increase the resiliency of our economy and of our province. Pharmacare would have a real impact on real people. And I have real stories from my community.

Constituent 1 is a senior on a fixed income and a lifelong user of a particular diabetic medication that worked. But they were switched over to another medication which didn't work nearly as well and had to jump through hoops to get approval to go back on the effective medication.

Constituent 2 retired at 62 and no longer had access to work health benefits. He thought that this was no big deal—that he was healthy enough and could wait until he became eligible for the provincial benefits at 65. And he was fine, until he wasn't and was diagnosed with cancer. Two weeks of blood-thinner injections—just one of his many prescriptions—cost \$1,200. He was able to apply for and receive Trillium benefits but had to pay out of pocket until then. He was awfully glad that he had had enough money to cover his costs until he got Trillium, but many can't.

Constituent 3 was a recent university graduate who was no longer on her parents' benefits plan and who, at 24, never expected to have cancer. And her out-of-pocket drug costs would have been \$25,000, but, fortunately, her workplace was unionized, so she had benefits. She would not have had the funds to cover her drugs and did not have time to delay that treatment to wait for Trillium. She's still with us today.

Constituent 4's mom is a senior citizen in northern Ontario who lives on a fixed income with no workplace

pension. She has a condition that causes her iron levels to drop to dangerously low levels and for a while was having to go to the emergency room every four to six weeks, spending between three to five days at a time in a hallway while receiving her iron infusions.

My constituent found out that her mom could be prescribed a medication that would prevent this—a once-a-month injection that costs around 800 bucks. But her mom can't afford that on her fixed income. So my constituent and her brother split the cost between them to cover it, so mom is stable.

And constituent 4 was employed for a long time and had a good-paying job with benefits in the automotive sector until the workplace closed down and the benefits went with it. And the cost of purchasing private insurance was prohibitive, so she prayed. She prayed to be healthy enough until she got old enough to qualify for provincial benefits at age 65. She had been prescribed Crestor for over two decades, and she had to make the choice of paying for the medication herself or coming off of it and taking her chances with possible heart disease.

**1820**

Well, she took herself off the medication and did all the things she could to stay healthy. After six months, she went to see her family doctor for her regular blood work—lucky woman had a family doctor. The blood test results were not good. She went back on Crestor, grateful that she was able to afford it by making other cuts to her household budget. This is a medication that's necessary, with harsh consequences if not taken as prescribed. An expanded eligibility of the Ontario drug benefit would help this constituent and, no doubt, many others like her.

We know that for many real people—real people outside of this Legislature—prescriptions come with impossible choices, choices to ration or skip doses of their medication because their budget won't allow them to take it every day. For others, they may never be able to fill the prescription and access the medicines that they need. We can't afford to let Ontarians become ill and suffer health complications when we could prevent it by providing access to the medications they need. We can achieve this by immediately expanding the eligibility for the Ontario drug benefit to include all Ontarians, regardless of age or income status, and we could do that today.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak to this very important private member's motion, a motion that would expand coverage—universal coverage—of medications to everyone in Ontario.

If there were one thing that I wish my patients would know, it's that I worry about them, even after the patient encounter is over. I go home. I think about them. I worry whether they're going to get better. I worry whether they're going to be able to fill their prescription.

Now, sometimes those patients tell me before they leave that they won't be able to. We start engaging in all sorts of somersaults to find a way to make it possible for

them. Maybe it's a condition where the ideal treatment would require taking a medication three times a day, but there's an alternative that can be taken five times a day. It's not as good; it's harder to adhere to. But at least it's something. Sometimes it's a combination puffer and, while it's not ideal, maybe we can give them two puffers that provide a similar impact.

But worse, I worry that there are those patients who can't fill their prescription and don't feel comfortable telling me that they can't fill that prescription. Every physician has had that experience. And every emergency physician has had the experience of treating someone who has come in with something absolutely catastrophic because they couldn't afford their medication—someone who comes in with a stroke because they couldn't afford their antihypertensives, someone who comes in with a clot in their lung because they couldn't afford their blood thinners.

So with the private member's motion that we have before us today, we have an opportunity, an opportunity to ask ourselves, what kind of a society do we want to be? Are we going to be a society that tells people how they can get better but doesn't give them a way to do it? Are we going to be a society that says, to save a couple bucks in not paying for someone's medication, we're willing to pay thousands of bucks a night for them to recover in an intensive care unit or on a critical care ward when something more catastrophic happens?

Truthfully, we already know the answer to this question. We know that we are a compassionate society committed to delivering universal, publicly funded health care. If we weren't that society, we wouldn't have programs like OHIP+, introduced by previous Liberal governments, or the Ontario drug benefit.

But the issue that we face today and that this House is trying to resolve with this motion is, what are we going to do for the people who are falling between the cracks? Because if you don't fall within current programs, if you can't afford your medications, if you don't have a job and therefore don't have access to supplemental health benefits, you have nothing. The reality is that, in Ontario today, we have some of the highest unemployment that we've ever seen before. We have some of the lowest small-business confidence that we've ever seen before. So people can't get access to supplemental health benefits, and businesses can't afford to provide them.

This motion is our opportunity for all of us to step forward and say we are going to be the society that looks out for our citizens the way that our health care system promises to and provides the care that all of us deserve.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**Mr. Tom Rakocevic:** I rise today in strong support of the motion brought forward by the member for Hamilton Centre calling on this government to implement universal prescription drug coverage for all Ontarians. She's an experienced doctor, and she speaks with powerful front-line knowledge about our health care system. She knows what must be done.



This motion is not just about policy. It's about principle. It's about finishing what Tommy Douglas started generations ago—the father of universal health care in Canada. He believed that no one should ever have to choose between their health and their wallet. And because of his courage, we built medicare—a system that ensures every Canadian can see a doctor or go to a hospital without fear of financial ruin. But Tommy Douglas knew that medicare was only the beginning. He called it the first stage. The next stage, he said, was to include coverage for prescription drugs. That dream remains unfulfilled for too many.

Today, we live in a province where you can see a doctor for free but you might not be able to afford the medication they prescribe. That's not universal health care. That's a gap—a dangerous, unjust and costly gap for too many.

One in five Canadians can't afford their medications, or they will skip doses to make prescriptions last longer. Many are hard-working individuals and parents, many working multiple jobs but without medical drug coverage for themselves or their families. Some cut their pills in half to stretch out prescriptions. Some parents choose between groceries and antibiotics for their children. Some are young people going without mental health medication because they don't have a drug plan.

When people can't afford their medications, they get sicker. They end up in emergency rooms. They suffer. And sometimes they die.

Universal pharmacare isn't just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do, and when asked, 86% of Canadians agree.

According to the Canadian Medical Association Journal, a national pharmacare program could save Canadians over \$7 billion a year. The Parliamentary Budget Officer found that while governments would spend more up front, the overall system would save billions through lower drug pricing, bulk purchasing, and better health outcomes.

But beyond the numbers, there is a deeper truth: Health is a right, not a privilege.

We don't ask people to pay out of pocket for a trip to their doctor or the emergency room, so why ask them to pay for the medication prescribed to them there?

We are only as healthy as the most vulnerable among us. If a person can't afford insulin, it affects us all. If a parent can't afford antidepressants, it affects their children, their workplace, their community.

This is about fairness. It's about human rights. It will create better health outcomes. It will save money. It is good policy. It is the right thing to do, and it must be done.

Speaker, we have the infrastructure. We have the evidence. We have the moral obligation. We just need the will.

Let us honour Tommy Douglas not with just our words, but with our actions. Let us finish what he started. Let us make universal pharmacare a reality for everyone, everywhere in Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**MPP Tyler Watt:** Congratulations to my colleague on her first private member's motion, and an important one at that. It warms my heart seeing more health care workers here at the Legislature.

I rise today not only as the member of provincial Parliament for Nepean, but as a registered nurse—someone who spent years at the bedside, seeing the real-life consequences of a broken system. Let me tell you what it looks like.

I remember a patient I cared for—managing diabetes, working two full-time jobs with no health benefits. He was rationing insulin, not because he didn't know better, but because he had to choose between bills and his prescription. He ended up in the hospital with diabetic ketoacidosis, something entirely preventable, something that cost the system far more than a steady supply of medication ever would have.

**1830**

This is not an isolated case. This is a story playing out in emergency rooms, urgent care clinics and community health centres across Ontario every single day.

One in five Ontarians either lacks prescription drug coverage or doesn't have enough. That's not just a health care gap; it's a crisis, and we can't keep pretending it isn't.

That's why I'm proud to support this motion—because universal access to prescription medications is a fundamental piece of a modern health care system. You can't say you believe in universal health care while leaving people to fend for themselves at the pharmacy counter.

Prescription drugs are not optional. They are as essential as a hospital bed, a diagnostic test or a surgery. And when people can't afford them, they don't take them. When they don't take them, they get sick. And when they get sick, they end up in the hospital, putting more pressure on an already strained system and costing us all more in the long run.

The goal here isn't just to treat illness; it's to prevent it—to keep people healthy, at home with their loved ones; not in a hospital bed, dealing with complications that never should have happened.

As a nurse, I've always believed in upstream care. You solve problems before they escalate. You intervene early. And that's exactly what this motion aims to do.

Let's be honest about how we got here. In 2018, the Ontario Liberal government introduced a plan to eliminate deductibles and copays for seniors under the Ontario drug benefit. It would have made medications more affordable for hundreds of thousands of Ontarians. It was going in the right direction. But this government cancelled that expansion before it could take effect. Since then, drug costs have not only gone up; more people are being forced to make impossible choices. And while provinces like BC, Manitoba and PEI have moved forward with federal government partnerships, Ontario has opted to sit on the sidelines—no plan, no urgency, just more people falling through the cracks. And who are those people? They're often the working poor—folks in precarious jobs, gig workers, small business owners, people who don't qualify for existing benefits and don't have private insurance.

They're not asking for handouts. They're asking for fairness, for a system that works.

I support this motion and moving towards actual universal access. We support doing it the right way, with a clear strategy that ensures the system is integrated, sustainable and equitable. We know the costs. But we also know the cost of inaction. And that's what we are living with now—the human cost of a government unwilling to lead.

I support this motion because I've seen what happens when we don't act. I've cared for the patients who couldn't afford to get better. I believe deeply that no one in Ontario should suffer or die simply because they couldn't pay for the medications they need.

Let's stop sending people to hospitals for conditions we could have prevented. And let's start building a health care system that includes access to medications as a basic part of health care—not a privilege.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** It's an honour to rise to speak in favour of this motion.

I want to congratulate the member from Hamilton Centre for bringing forward your first motion, and an important motion indeed.

We have an opportunity to decide what kind of society we want to be. Do we want to be a caring society that takes care of each other or not?

Right now, we have a crisis of caring throughout Ontario. You see it in the 2.5 million people who don't have access to a family doctor or a nurse practitioner. You see it in the number of emergency department closures we see in rural communities, especially, across the province. And you see it in the number of constituents who come to my office and, I'm sure, the offices of MPPs of all parties in all parts of the province to talk about how they cannot afford their medications that have been prescribed to them—people who can't afford diabetic medicine and end up in emergency departments; a middle-aged man who came to my office and did not take his heart medication and ended up in the ICU in hospital.

As a matter of fact, a quarter of Canadians cut pills in half because they can't afford a full dosage. A third of Canadians have no drug benefit coverage at all. Speaker, 63% report that they spend over \$100 a year in out-of-pocket expenses for drugs, and 11% over \$1,000 a year. For somebody who's struggling to pay the rent, put food on the table, care for their family and loved ones, the thing that oftentimes gets sacrificed in that equation is their health.

We have an opportunity to vote for a motion calling on the government to expand the Ontario drug benefit to all Ontarians regardless of their age, regardless of their income or their employment status.

I can't tell you how many people have come into my office—or I've just talked to them at the farmers' market or walking around downtown—who have talked about the fact that they would like to switch jobs, but they can't because they have to maintain their supplemental health

insurance benefits. People have talked to me about how they're trying to get off Ontario Disability Support or Ontario Works and are terrified to do it because they'll lose their health benefits and not be able to afford their prescriptions. So who pays the price for that? Well, first of all, people pay the price in their own health. Second of all, our health care system pays the price, because it costs so much more money to care for people when they reach an acute state of health—when we could have prevented that trip to the emergency department or sometimes even to the doctor, or a lengthy stay in hospital.

If we actually have a public plan, we can also help businesses save money because they no longer will have to have the costs of providing supplemental health insurance benefits for pharmaceuticals. We can save money for society as a whole because we'll be able to buy in bulk. As a matter of fact, the PBO has estimated—across Canada, at least—that we could save around \$1.4 billion to \$2.2 billion on pharmaceutical costs, so if you want to think of Ontario, it would be about half that, or 40%, on a population basis, for Ontario, saving families and businesses significant expenses and reducing costs to our health care system.

I only have a few seconds left—because I probably have a sense of where the government is going to go with this motion.

But at the very least, can we agree on a rare diseases drug benefit strategy for this province so that people who need take-home cancer drugs, people who can't access things like Trikafta for their CF can actually access those kinds of drugs they need to maintain their quality of life and their health?

My hope is that the government will say yes to caring for people and yes to expanding drug coverage in this province.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I read the motion for tonight's debate, and it sounded very familiar to me. I was sure I heard it somewhere else before. So I went online, I did a little bit of research, and I came across an article from the CBC—that's the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. Here's the headline from that article: "Liberals and New Democrats Reach a Deal on Pharmacare." And now I'm going to quote the article for you:

"The federal Liberal government and the NDP have come to an agreement on pharmacare, clearing the way for the two parties to continue operating under the confidence-and-supply agreement that has helped keep the government in power over the past two years.

"In an interview with CBC's Rosemary Barton Live airing Sunday, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh said weeks of talks between the two sides have produced draft legislation that will set out the framework for a national pharmacare program and, in the short term, new coverage for contraception and diabetes treatment.

**1840**

"A senior government source confirmed that an agreement had been reached."

And then the news article went on, and it quoted the then NDP leader, Jagmeet Singh, and this is what he is said to have said: “Singh said the legislation ‘clearly points to (a) single-payer’ system and includes references to the Canada Health Act, the federal legislation that sets out the terms under which the federal government agrees to fund medicare services in Canada.

“‘We’ve gotten a lot,’ Singh said.”

That was the news article by the CBC touting the agreement between the NDP and the Liberals at the federal level. They sure talked a lot about this deal, and it seemed that the federal NDP were very proud of it. They said they “got a lot.” I don’t know what they meant when they said “a lot” because, from what I read, it looks like they got coverage for only two things, one of which was contraception. When you think about that for a second—of all the things you could ask for under a pharmacare agreement, what they put at the top of their ask, at the top of their list, was contraception. They could have asked for all sorts of things. They could have asked for many of the things that I heard about talking tonight: medication for this, medication for that. But instead, the NDP put at the top of their list contraception. I found that interesting.

I come across another news article, and it has this blaring headline—this one comes from the Toronto Star; we’re familiar with the Toronto Star—and this is what the headline says: “NDP Leader Says Working with Liberals on Pharmacare like Wrestling with ‘Slimy’ Eels.” That caught my eye because usually when you’re talking about eels, you refer to “slippery” eels, as in, “Dealing with the Liberals is like dealing with slippery eels.” That would be the common way to use “eels.” But in this particular example the NDP leader, Jagmeet Singh, didn’t use the phrase “slippery” eels; he used “slimy” eels. I wonder why he called the Liberals “slimy” eels, rather than “slippery” eels. I was wondering if that was merely a slip of the tongue, and, I have to admit, I didn’t call Jagmeet Singh to verify the quote. I have to rely on the Toronto Star for the quote.

The article went on to go and say this: “Working with the Liberals on pharmacare legislation has been like wrestling eels covered in oil, as NDP leader Jagmeet Singh describes it.” Then the article goes on to describe the Liberals this way: “They’re just slimy and break their promises.” I just want to make this clear: This is Jagmeet Singh, the leader of the federal NDP, making these statements. I’m not ascribing any of these statements to any present member of this Legislature. This is somebody totally different.

The article goes on to say this: “Both parties have been working on the legislation for months”—

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Point of order.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** —“both characterizing the negotiations as tough.”

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Member from Essex, we have a point of order from the member from Kingston and the Islands. Stop the clock.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I am just inquiring as to the relevance. I was wondering if you could rule on the relevance of the speech of my honourable colleague.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** The debate is relative. The member from Essex, please carry on.

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Yes, I suppose somebody might ask, how is it relevant when you’re talking about pharmacare to describe the Liberals as slimy eels? But the reason why Jagmeet Singh said “slimy” eels, I suppose, would be with Jagmeet Singh. You’d have to ask him why he said the Liberals were “slimy” eels because, as I described earlier, the typical way you use “eels” is “slippery” eels. I would have thought that Jagmeet Singh would have said the Liberals are “slippery” eels, but instead he said the Liberals are “slimy” eels. I would invite Jagmeet Singh to explain why he chose to describe the Liberals as slimy rather than slippery.

Now, I found all of this interesting. I have to fully acknowledge that a national universal pharmacare program would be very expensive, so of course we need to ask the federal government—which, by the way, is now controlled by the Liberals with the NDP holding the balance of power. We’ve seen that dynamic for a long time, right? The federal government being controlled by the Liberals with the NDP holding the balance of power. We’d have to ask them what their contribution would be to this plan that the Liberals and the NDP here are suggesting tonight. Maybe the contribution would be nothing at all. I haven’t heard of any contribution, and I know that the Ontario NDP have not suggested that the federal government is going to make any contribution, and the Liberals in this House have not suggested that the federal government will make any contribution. So we have to conclude, at the time of having this discussion right now, that the federal government, controlled by the Liberals with the support of the NDP—one would presume—will make no contribution whatsoever to something that Liberal and NDP members say they find so dear, which I think is inconsistent, if you find it so dear.

Now, the provincial government at this level has already launched an ambitious building program, and we have 50 hospitals under way, we have 50 hospitals under construction as we speak—pardon me; 17, I meant. We have 17 hospitals under construction as we speak, and I have a list of those hospital construction projects going on in Brantford, Cambridge, Toronto, Grimsby, Niagara Falls, Picton, Scarborough, another one in Toronto, Thunder Bay, another one in Toronto and one in Moose Factory, Moosonee. That is a remarkable multi-billion-dollar commitment made by the provincial government to the hospital system in Ontario, and we’re very proud of that.

In addition to launching this multi-billion-dollar hospital program at the provincial level, we are also adding a multi-million-dollar—you might say multi-billion-dollar—program to connect people to primary care. Why do we think primary care is so important in Ontario? Because primary care keeps people out of hospitals. That’s right; it keeps people out of hospitals. When you can connect people to primary care—that is, care provided by either a family doctor or a nurse practitioner—it keeps them out of hospitals, and that’s very important. That involves implementing Bill 13, which is what this government has put on the table.

We also have the fact that the Ontario government also pays for a great deal of pharmacy care in the province already. Now, I talked to my pharmacist, and he said Ontario has the best pharmacy care in all of Canada. Part of this is because the Ontario Drug Benefit Program supports approximately nine million people in Ontario. The type of people who get coverage under this program are children and youth under 24, seniors aged 65 and over, people receiving social assistance, residents in long-term-care homes and other types of homes—special care homes—people receiving professional home community care services and households enrolled in the Trillium Drug Program. This is a comprehensive safety net, one that ensures that our most vulnerable populations do not get left behind, and workplace insurance currently covers many other people in Ontario.

So, while I can respect the good intentions of some people who brought this motion, and perhaps even support it, it really appears there is a great deal of work to do here. There's a great deal of work to do here because we don't even know if the federal government is going to participate, nor if, after all of these pronouncements that they've made over and over and over again, they would back a national pharmacare program.

Now, one would presume that having most recently gone through this much-ballyhooed deal with the NDP at the federal level—perhaps they'll revive it, because the status quo hasn't changed in Ottawa. We still have the Liberals running the government with the NDP holding the balance of power. If they wanted to do this a year ago, maybe they'll do it again. But let's see what happens. Let's see what contribution the federal government is going to make to this.

**1850**

We know that our Premier is able to work across party lines. He'll work across party lines with anybody who's willing to do something that's good for the province of Ontario. He's good at negotiating those deals. So let's see what they come up with at the federal level, and then maybe at that point we can proceed. But at the very, very least, tonight, as we discuss this right now, we know that the federal government, at least based on the information that we have right now as we speak, is making no contribution whatsoever.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**M<sup>me</sup> France G  linas:** Before I start my speech, the federal government pharmacare program for birth control and diabetes is still going on. The province of British Columbia and the province of Manitoba have signed on. When is Ontario going to sign on? There is money on the table right now.

But I want to say how proud I am of my colleague from Hamilton Centre. In a time when we're facing tariffs, in a time when we're facing a lot of uncertainty, where workers could lose their jobs, she brings forward a motion that defines us as Canadian, that defines us as different from our friends to the south. Medicare is a program that defines us. We get the care based on our needs, not on our

ability to pay, and this is something that every Canadian is proud of.

What my colleague is doing is bringing the second phase of medicare, and the second phase of medicare—even Tommy Douglas, when he was still alive, was talking about the second phase of medicare, and that was to bring pharmacare. When Tommy Douglas brought medicare, he did not bring it to all of Canada; he brought it to Saskatchewan. Once Saskatchewan had it, then Saskatchewan was the leader, and then it became a program known throughout Canada. Ontario tonight has an opportunity to do the same thing. Ontario tonight has an opportunity to be a leader, just like my colleague from Hamilton Centre. Be the leader that people need. Be the leader that is needed in this time of tariffs, in this time of chaos south of the border, and bring pharmacare forward.

Pharmacare has been trialled throughout the world. In Australia, prescription renewal increased by 35%, increasing medication adherence, when they brought pharmacare. In France, hospitalization due to preventable conditions decreased by 28% when they brought pharmacare. In Germany, life expectancy increased by five years and the preventable disease rate dropped by 22% when they brought in pharmacare. In New Zealand, medication compliance increased by 39%, leading to better chronic disease management. In Sweden, the mortality rate from chronic conditions decreased by 31%. In the United Kingdom, preventable death has decreased by 26% since implementation—I could go on and on. As has been said, Canada is the only country in the world that has full-fledged medicare but does not have pharmacare.

The biggest responsibility of all of us in this room, the biggest responsibility of the Ontario provincial government is health care. That's why \$85 billion of our budget goes to health care. It is our biggest responsibility. We have an opportunity tonight as legislators to rise up to that responsibility to say we are in a time of flux, we are in a time that is difficult, we are in a time where we want to say we will never be the 51st state and send a clear message, and that message will be that we are bringing pharmacare to Ontario. Ontario will be the leader that the rest of Canada will follow—the sooner the better.

I want to thank, again, my colleague from Hamilton Centre. I am so proud of you.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** The member from Hamilton Centre has two minutes to wrap up.

**MPP Robin Lennox:** I would like to thank so many of the other members in this House tonight for voicing their support for universal pharmacare and what it would offer the people of Ontario, specifically in this moment where we're at, where so many people are struggling to get by, so many people are worried about losing their employment and so many people are worried about losing their benefits.

I was dismayed to hear that the only kind of concrete opposition I could hear from the member of the Conservative Party was that the federal Liberal and NDP governments thought of it first. I think if we wait for ideas to come from the other side of the aisle that will really advance us in health care, we may be waiting a long time.

It was lovely to hear you speak in reverence about family doctors. So, as a family doctor, here is my advice to you on how we could actually improve health care here.

This motion is about what we stand for as a province. Are we a province that stands for caring for each other? For taking care of people when they are ill? For taking care of people so that they're able to stay healthy? Do we stand for equal access to health care for people no matter how much money they have in the bank or what they're going to earn? Do we stand for providing health care to people of all ages or just during some stages of life? Do we stand for making sure that every single person who is working and living in Ontario is able to do so and access the full range of health services that we have promised them and yet we have not delivered?

That is what this motion is about. And beyond that, we can save money. We can put money back into people's pockets instead of spending on medications. We can save our health system, and in doing so, we can make one of the biggest advances in health care in this province and actually show true, genuine leadership.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MPP Lennox has moved private member's motion number 2. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Five members have stood. A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

*Vote deferred.*

## ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

### GOVERNMENT SPENDING

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** The member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Finance. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and a minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

**Mr. John Fraser:** Thank you, Speaker. It's nice to see such a big crowd for a late show. I don't think it's because of me, but since you're here, let's have a healthy debate about this.

I do want to say to the member from Essex that he will not hear me use the word "slimy" in my speech. He won't hear me say that, because I would never use that word to describe my colleagues. I wouldn't use that. I just think that that's not a nice word to use. But he used it about 10 or 15 times. I don't want to object to it, but I want to point it out.

What I do want to tell him is, what's unconscionable, if he's listening, is that last year this government spent \$40 million—that's right, four-zero million dollars—on an ad called "It's all happening here."

You want to know what's not happening here? What's not happening here is take-home cancer drugs that the Canadian Cancer Society has been asking for more than a decade. There are constituents in all of your ridings that need these. Do you know how much that would cost each year, the member from Essex? How much do you think it would cost? How much? About \$40 million. Instead of spending that \$40 million on take-home cancer drugs and making sure those people had relief and what they needed, the government chose, to spend that money on an ad to make it look good because they wanted an election.

So I'm not going to use that word that I said that I wouldn't use, but I will use the word that it's "unconscionable," and I would like the member to think about that, to think about that spending after his glib rhetoric about a very, very serious issue that faces people. It's a serious issue, and I don't appreciate his glibness. As I said, I won't use that word again.

### 1900

Since 2018, this government has spent money, hundreds of millions of dollars, on ads that have been described by the Auditor General as partisan in nature, ads that are only there to benefit the image of the government—hundreds of millions of dollars that could have been spent on our crumbling schools, hiring teachers, hiring PSWs, hiring nurses, getting more doctors, paying for take-home cancer drugs.

But in particular, this one ad that cost \$40 million said, "It's all happening here." Here's what's happening here: record debt, almost a trillion dollars, something to be really proud of; record unemployment in Ontario; record youth unemployment in Canada, the highest youth unemployment in Canada right now; 2.5 million Ontarians don't have a family doctor; our schools are crumbling; we're closing ERs. It's like, "Everything's fine." The Premier is out there spending tens of millions of dollars, trying to tell us he's doing a great job. It has no intrinsic benefit to the health, the welfare, the education of people in Ontario. It is a waste of money, but it's all for the benefit of the Premier and his party. The Auditor General very clearly says that and has raised that issue.

So I would think that a party that declares itself conservative would not want to waste taxpayers' money in the way that they are. It's just like flushing it down the drain. When you think of what that money could be spent on—I think it's 495 teachers, 820 educational assistants; I don't know how many nurses, how many doctors. And that \$40-million ad could pay for take-home cancer drugs. Don't we all want the people we represent to have access to those? Do you not want that? Is that what the member from Essex is saying? Is that what he's saying when he's fighting against pharmacare, when he's saying it's okay to spend \$40 million on one single ad? We don't even know December and January of last year, so I bet you it will be closer to \$50 million.

So I don't think that's something to be proud of. I don't understand how you can say that you're Conservatives when you're flushing money down the drain, money that could be better spent helping people, better spent keeping people healthy, better spent making sure that people in our communities who needed take-home cancer drugs had access to them.

I don't know how much of a point I can put on this, because it doesn't seem like it's penetrating the member from Essex's skull.

Thank you, Speaker. I think I'm finished now.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Response? I recognize the member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

**Mr. Dave Smith:** What we know is that when Ontario has a strong economy, Ontario has the revenue to pay for the things that the people of Ontario expect. We know that in the seven years that we have been in government, we have seen record increases in revenue without raising a single tax. Revenues are up \$70 billion in seven years. It's unprecedented.

The question then needs to be asked: Why? Why have government revenues gone up without raising tax? Why have government revenues gone up by lowering fees and expenses? Why? Because we're focused on the economy.

When we look at what's happening in Ontario, when we look at what we inherited—we saw 300,000 jobs leave. We've seen almost a million created in Ontario since we have taken power, and every single jurisdiction in North America is looking to Ontario to find out why. In fact, Alberta had an advertising campaign—you could see it on the TTC: "Alberta is Calling." What were they trying to get; what were they calling? They were calling Ontario's skilled tradesmen. All of those skilled trades workers they were calling to Alberta. And Newfoundland ran a series called "Run Wild," a series of five different ads in Ontario, and they were looking to bring people from Ontario to Newfoundland. British Columbia took a look at what Ontario was doing, and British Columbia ran ads in Ontario to get our skilled workers to leave the province.

So, amid unprecedented global economic uncertainty, Ontario said, "We need to be proud of Ontario. We need to tell Ontario's story of success. We need to make sure that not just the people of Ontario know what we were doing right but that the American people could also see what Ontario was doing to protect their jobs, to protect workers, to protect Ontario's economy." Because if Ontario's economy is not going well, we don't have the revenues to do the things that everyone expects.

And, unlike the Liberals, who actually introduced this legislation, we followed all of the rules that the Liberals laid out in that legislation. The Auditor General took a look at all of the ads and said, "Yes, this fits the rules that the Liberals put forward."

Interestingly, we've received seven straight clean audits from the Auditor General. We've reduced our debt-to-GDP ratio, and we improved our credit rating. By comparison, the Liberals did the reverse of that. Our credit rating dropped, our debt-to-GDP ratio went up, and they did not receive a clean audit from the Auditor General every

single year. In fact, in the last four years, they didn't even hit 50% clean audits.

So I find it very interesting, then, that the Liberals would stand up and say Ontario should not be doing something to keep the people of Ontario, to keep the skilled workers in Ontario, to make sure that everyone knows we're doing the things we need to protect the people of Ontario, to protect the jobs of Ontario and to protect the economy in Ontario so that the people of Ontario get the things that they deserve to get from their government.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I will now call for orders of the day.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2025

#### LOI DE 2025 SUR LA RESPONSABILITÉ AU NIVEAU MUNICIPAL

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 27, 2025, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct / Projet de loi 9, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la cité de Toronto et la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités en ce qui concerne les codes de déontologie.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** It is a pleasure to rise as the MPP for London West to participate in the debate on Bill 9, the Municipal Accountability Act. This is an important bill that attempts to increase accountability for municipally elected officials and to hold local councillors and mayors to high standards of ethical conduct. Certainly, that's something that we would all like to see. It is something that the public certainly deserves.

We have all had experiences or read media reports about councillors who have engaged in reprehensible, offensive and harassing behaviours or actions. And when there's no accountability for local elected officials who commit such acts, it denies justice for those who have been harmed and creates an environment that silences others from coming forward. It diminishes public trust. It signals that there are two sets of rules: one for those in elected office, who don't have to be held accountable for their actions, and one for everyone else. I would argue, and I hope that everyone in this House would agree, that those who hold a position of public trust ought to be held to a higher standard of accountability, not a lesser one.

#### 1910

When bullying and harassment by a local councillor is directed at staff, which it often is, it becomes a workplace health and safety issue that poisons the workplace environment. This is a real and pervasive concern. The Ontario Municipal Administrators Association recently reported

that 77% of their members had experienced harassment and bullying by elected officials; 76% stated that they had been personally on the receiving end of harassment by a member of council.

In my own community of London, a councillor was found by the city's integrity commissioner to have engaged in a pattern of harassment, bullying and targeting of city staff. This was the second violation of the code of conduct by this councillor, and, just last December, it resulted in a one-month suspension.

When the harassment is sexual in nature, it becomes an issue of workplace sexual violence, as was the case of Ottawa councillor Rick Chiarelli who was found, over the course of six formal investigations by different Ottawa integrity commissioners, to have "continuously exploited the power dynamic of the employer/employee relationship" and committed incomprehensible incidents of harassment. The integrity commissioners recommended the strictest penalties allowed under the law, which was a 90-day suspension for each of the six complaints, or 540 days without pay. Despite the severity of the offences and the gravity of the findings, Chiarelli refused to resign and there was no provision in the law allowing for him to be removed.

This lack of municipal authority to force the removal from office of a councillor who's been found by an integrity commissioner to have committed egregious acts of workplace harassment mobilized an advocacy movement called The Women of Ontario Say No, made up largely of women in elected office themselves or women who work in municipal governments. Currently, the most severe penalty, as I mentioned, that can be imposed on a municipal councillor is the suspension of pay for 90 days. The Women of Ontario Say No have been pushing for government legislation to provide a process for removing councillors from office when egregious acts are committed and substantiated. Even if a councillor has been convicted of a criminal offence, so long as the offence does not result in imprisonment, they can continue serving in office without any legal means to remove him or her.

The Women of Ontario Say No circulated a resolution calling for legislative changes to municipal codes of conduct and enforcement that was endorsed by more than 200 of Ontario's 444 councils. Among the changes advocated for was to allow application for a judicial review to vacate a member's seat. Currently, a judge can order removal of a local councillor if there has been violation of conflict of interest or if a councillor has been imprisoned and misses three consecutive months of meetings without council authorization. Otherwise, even a criminal conviction has no formal impact on a councillor's eligibility for council and the maximum available penalty for violating a municipal code of conduct is a reprimand or that 90-day suspension. As The Women of Ontario Say No have stated: "A fundamental, underlying principle of broadening diversity, equity and inclusion in politics rests on the assumption that the workplace is safe. This is currently not the case...."

"When councillors who have perpetrated harassment to staff or fellow councillors can retain their position, no matter how serious, it creates and protects toxic work-

places, which in turn has an adverse effect on mental health in the workplace and throughout the community."

Bill 9 does respond to the call from The Women of Ontario Say No and others for a mechanism to remove council members who have committed serious misconduct such as sexual harassment. Unfortunately, however, it does not provide the mechanism that was recommended by The Women of Ontario Say No as well as the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and others, and that recommended provision is to enable council to apply to a judge for a decision on removing a city member. They argued that this is important to avoid the politicization that could arise if the decision is left up to council. It's also important to prevent re-traumatization of the victim.

So, Speaker, you've heard from other members of our caucus: The Ontario NDP is supporting the bill that is before us today, Bill 9, but we do have some reservations. We do want to see it sent to committee so that it can be reviewed by experts and stakeholder organizations like The Women of Ontario Say No or the Association of Municipalities of Ontario or the Ontario Municipal Administrators Association and others. Interested members of the public, people who currently serve in elected office, or are interested in serving, may also want to come before members of this Legislature to provide feedback on the bill. We need to get that feedback, to get that input to understand people's views on whether the process that is outlined in this bill is going to be effective in dealing with the kind of egregious misconduct that we have seen in councils, in communities across the province.

I want to provide some background for those who are watching tonight on what is currently in the Municipal Act on dealing with misconduct and how this legislation has arrived on the floor of this Legislature. There have been years of concerns that have been raised about lack of municipal accountability, and as a result, this government made changes to the Municipal Act in 2019 which required each of Ontario's 444 municipalities to hire an integrity commissioner and enact a code of conduct addressing, at a minimum, four specific subject matters that were set out in regulation. These changes were viewed as balancing recognition of the importance of ethical standards for elected officials with the autonomy of local councils to create their own codes of conduct that reflected their local communities. In practice, many municipalities, such as my community of London—their codes of conduct do cover many more areas than the four prescribed elements that are set out in the legislation.

The problem, however, is that this means that there are potentially 444 slightly different codes of conduct that exist around this province, and there are many different integrity commissioners who are hired by those 444 municipalities and each of those integrity commissioners can have different interpretations of those unique codes of conduct. This has resulted in a fragmented framework that is inconsistently applied from one jurisdiction to the other.

The other issue that has arisen is the inconsistency in the hiring and retention of integrity commissioners. Many municipalities use an RFP process to hire integrity commissioners, which means that there is significant variation

in the requirements, responsibilities and experience of the people who are hired to fulfill that role. Some integrity commissioners serve multiple jurisdictions. Some serve as many as maybe 60 municipalities. Others are hired as full-time employees of a single municipality. Some are paid an annual salary, some are on retainer and some are paid on a per project basis.

**1920**

The Premier had requested former Integrity Commissioner of Ontario David Wake to do a review of this fragmented system, and in his report on the review, he described the current system as costly, cumbersome and confusing. Other experts have described it much more evocatively as a “Wild West” and even a “cash cow.”

I want to quote from a recent article that interviewed some experts in government ethics policy. They said, “Due to a lack of provincial oversight and standardized processes, taxpayers can be footing ‘excessive billing’ and conflict of interest issues are popping up in some communities. Some say the system is ‘broken,’ questionable appointments are happening, and say major players are taking on dozens of contracts at a time.”

This bill does set out some measures to deal with these issues. It repeals the authority of municipalities to develop their own codes of conduct, and it creates terms of reference for a standard code of conduct and standardized integrity commissioner investigation processes.

Most importantly, it establishes a process to remove a council or local board member following an investigation by a municipal integrity commissioner about a potential breach of the code of conduct. The municipal integrity commissioners can send a recommendation for removal to the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario if they believe that there has been a contravention of the code of conduct; if the violation is on a matter of a serious nature; if it has resulted in harm to the health, safety or well-being of persons; and if the existing available penalties, reprimand or up to 90-day suspension are considered insufficient to address the contravention.

At that point, the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario then conducts an inquiry to determine whether those criteria for removal have been met. They may consider whether the contravention negatively impacts public confidence or the ability of the member to discharge their duties or the council to fulfill their role. If the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario determines that the criteria for removal have been met, then they report back to the council that brought them the contravention with a recommendation for removal. If the criteria have not been met, then the matter is referred back to the municipal integrity commissioner.

At that point, if the criteria haven’t been met and it goes back to the municipal integrity commissioner, then the local process continues. There’s a report, and then council has to make a decision on reprimand or suspension.

However, if the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario recommends removal, then there has to be a vote of council whether to approve the recommendation, and that vote of council has to be unanimous in order for it to proceed. If there is unanimous support to remove, the seat

is declared vacant and the member is disqualified for four years. If council does not approve the recommendation to remove, the member goes back to serving. There are no penalties whatsoever.

Our major concern with this bill lies with these provisions on removal. We do absolutely agree that there needs to be a mechanism to remove a councillor for a breach of code of conduct that has endangered the health and safety of others. However, we are concerned that the requirement for a unanimous vote of council to support a recommendation of removal by the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario is a very high bar. If there is even a single dissenting voice, the recommendation fails. In addition, putting the onus of decision-making back on council rather than in the hands of a judge also risks politicizing the removal process, or at least allowing the appearance of politicization.

The bill requires the completion of two inquiries by two integrity commissioners before council can vote on whether to remove a councillor that has breached the code of conduct on a serious matter. Council does not have the option of imposing lesser penalties if they believe, or even if just one councillor believes, that removal goes too far. If the recommendation fails—and this is a very serious concern, Speaker—there are no consequences whatsoever. The matter does not just go back to the municipal process and the normal municipal penalties can then be considered. The matter is dropped. The person who was investigated is allowed to continue to serve in that role.

This leaves a municipal council with two choices: They can either uphold the recommendation from the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario to remove, or they can let the offender off scot-free with no penalties whatsoever, no reprimand, no suspension, no removal. The integrity commissioner for the City of Toronto has warned that this could create a perverse incentive where municipal integrity commissioners could decide not to recommend removal in serious cases because of the risk that the recommendation wouldn’t pass a unanimous vote of council, which would mean there would be no penalties whatsoever.

We are very interested in hearing from Ontarians, from people who are experts in municipal governance and codes of conduct, to understand if the provisions that are set out in this bill will actually address the most egregious violations of codes of conduct, such as we have seen in the province of Ontario, because the last thing that I think any of us who currently serve in this place want to see is another instance of a councillor like Rick Chiarelli in Ottawa committing horrendous offences against women and being allowed to continue to serve.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further questions and comments?

**Ms. Natalie Pierre:** The elected municipal officials in my riding of Burlington have expressed support for Bill 9, the Municipal Accountability Act. The act aims to standardize municipal codes of conduct and establish a consistent integrity commissioner inquiry process. I’d like to ask the member from London West if she thinks it makes sense to bring forward a single, clear province-wide standard?



**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you to the member for Burlington for the question. Certainly that was a recommendation from the former Integrity Commissioner of Ontario, David Wake, and it is something that we would support. However, it does create the risk that certain municipalities that have gone above and beyond in creating very rigorous codes of conduct may end up with a watered-down code because the standardized provisions that are set out by regulation under this bill may not be as strict. So, while there is some value in standardized codes of conduct, there is also a risk depending on what the standardized code looks like.

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**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions?

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** Thank you to my colleague from London West for that.

Having lived through and been part of the council that Rick Chiarelli was on, I can't imagine what the consequences would be of women coming forward—in this case, they were harassed online. They went through a lot to bring this case to the forefront; that's why we're here tonight. I can't imagine what it would be like for them to see their abuser let off the hook because one member of council decided to abstain. As the member from Orléans said, you could just walk out and get a coffee, and nothing would happen.

I'd just like to ask the member from London West: How do you think that a woman, after being sexually harassed by a city councillor, would see that that councillor could get off, while another councillor who missed three months of meetings in a row loses their seat? Because those are the rules: If you miss three months in a row, nobody has to judge you; you are finished. You have to leave council. So I wonder if the member from London West could speculate on how that would make women feel who come forward.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I appreciate the question from my colleague the member from Ottawa Centre. Certainly, I think that it's for the very reasons that the member described that we saw such a massive mobilization with The Women of Ontario Say No. We know that many women work in municipal government. We want to see more women serving in elected roles in municipal office and what we saw in Ottawa creates huge barriers, both for staff to want to come forward if they know that there's going to be no penalties whatsoever if they bring their complaint forward, if they share personal details of what has happened to them in the workplace and there's no consequences. It creates this chilling effect on others who have been harassed, but it also makes local government a very unfriendly place for any woman to want to serve, if the person that she is serving beside can freely harass colleagues and staff members and not face any consequences whatsoever.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions?

**Mr. John Fraser:** I'd like to thank the member from London West, who I had the pleasure of working with, actually, on our members' code of conduct about seven years ago. I know how important the issues are to her and

her deep understanding of codes of conduct and the need for consequences.

I guess the thing that I'm struggling with is, we've had a lot of stops and starts with this bill and many promises to make sure that we would pass something that would be meaningful. What I'm hearing from a lot of members is that there really isn't enough consequence attached to it and the threshold to get to a consequence is easy to not meet, just simply by somebody not showing up. Does the member from London West want to comment on that?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** I appreciate the question from my colleague the member from Ottawa South. Certainly, establishing a members' code of conduct was an important step forward for this place. But the reality of codes of conduct is that there has to be consequences for violations of the code, and those consequences have to be real. If you set the bar so high that the consequence is virtually impossible to be applied or is quite likely not to meet the criteria to put it in place, then the code of conduct is meaningless because nothing happens when the code is violated.

So it's very, very important to ensure that there is a mechanism for removal of members who have breached the code of conduct and that the mechanism is actually actionable.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions?

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** I just wanted to ask—I think one of the things that The Women of Ontario Say No, Emily McIntosh, referenced was that we already see a smaller number of women in politics than men and there is a rise in society of misogyny. How do you think these codes of conduct—if we see a tweak in the voting and some of the conditions change to make it more applicable, how would that change the political sphere to make it more inviting, to find more balance in that area?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Thank you to the member for Kitchener Centre for that question. This was exactly why The Women of Ontario Say No came together to mobilize, to push for legislative changes from this government, because they believed very strongly that we need to make our elected officials have to look like the people that they represent; we need to ensure diversity and equity among those who serve in elected office.

Without codes of conduct that include very strict penalties for violations of the code of conduct, it really is a huge disincentive for anyone to want to serve in an elected role. If they know that they are vulnerable to bullying and harassment from the people who serve alongside them, or if they see violations of the code in interactions with staff.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to my colleague for her deputation this evening on a very important bill. I just want to go back to a comment that she was referring to earlier about the standardization around the Integrity Commissioner process and ask her opinion on the fact that eliminating the need for each municipality to develop and maintain its own code of conduct, and by streamlining the integrity process, we expect on this side of the House that

this change will be cost neutral or even cost-saving in the long run. Encouraging strong upfront training is important in this process. Fewer complaints, fewer investigations is the hope through these changes. Would the member not support that? It's cost-neutral for our municipal partners, stronger upfront training, sort of standardizing that moving forward.

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** Strong codes of conduct, training and codes of conduct, consistent application of codes of conduct—this is all very important. But without penalties for violation of the codes of conduct, we're not going to see the change in behaviour that we need to see. So we need to know, when this bill goes to committee, if this mechanism going to be effective in actually removing those who have committed very egregious violations of those codes.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Thank you. The member from Ottawa South has a point of order.

**Mr. John Fraser:** Yes, earlier this evening I referenced penetrating the member from Essex's thick skull. What I meant to say was I was having difficulty penetrating the member from Essex's pretzel logic. Thank you, Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** I don't believe that's a point of order.

Further debate?

**MPP Stephanie Smyth:** Thank you, Speaker, and I wanted to let you know that I'm sharing the debate tonight with my colleague from Ajax.

Good evening, and I rise tonight to talk about Bill 9, the Municipal Accountability Act. Let me begin by recognizing that the intent behind this bill to strengthen integrity and accountability at the municipal level is one that we absolutely welcome. We agree that every community in Ontario deserves elected officials who serve with transparency, responsibility and respect for public trust.

Just so you know, our support for this bill comes despite this government's track record, not because of it. This bill is years in the making, and it follows countless requests, and it follows extensive consultations that concluded in 2021. So, it is about time.

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For far too long, municipal leaders and community members have called for stronger standards of conduct and enforcement tools to address serious misconduct in local government. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario, or AMO, has consistently advocated for this, and yet, despite promising reforms more than four years ago, this government waited until now to act. Only when the pressure became too great to ignore did they finally table this bill.

While this legislation takes a step toward more enforceable codes of conduct, it falls short in critical ways. In its current form, the bill defers far too much to future regulation rather than embedding essential safeguards and standards in the legislation itself. This raises serious concerns about transparency, consistency and the real-world enforceability of these reforms.

We've heard from stakeholders, including AMO, who have clearly stated that this bill does not reflect the

diversity of Ontario's 444 municipalities. That one-size-fits-all framework may sound really efficient, but it fails to take into account the vast differences in local governments. And while the proposed process for councillor removal aims to address serious misconduct, the requirement for unanimous approval, no matter how clear the violation, is simply impractical. AMO has rightly flagged that without progressive penalties or a realistic enforcement mechanism, serious misconduct could still go unpunished.

So, yes, Speaker, there are provisions in this bill that we support, but if we are truly committed to restoring trust in government, this legislation must do more than signal change; it must deliver it. And that starts with listening to municipalities, strengthening safeguards and ensuring that accountability cannot be sidestepped on a technicality or delayed by, say, an election.

One of the most fundamental issues with Bill 9 is that it doesn't reflect the full scope or diversity of the municipal landscape in Ontario. Across our province, municipalities come in all shapes and sizes, from dense urban centres to remote rural communities, from fast-growing suburbs to northern townships where distance, capacity and resources present daily challenges. So the way that local government works in one part of Ontario often looks really different in another, and for good reason. These councils were built to meet local needs, to reflect the communities they serve and to operate within the resources they actually have. No two municipalities are the same, and pretending they are only creates more problems.

Yet, this bill puts forward a top-down, one-size-fits-all model that will be created not through legislation but actually through regulation handed down by cabinet. Bill 9 allows the government to prescribe a province-wide code of conduct and mandates that all municipalities comply. It also gives the minister sweeping authority to set requirements for training, education, reporting and the process for integrity investigations across the board.

What it doesn't do is consider whether municipalities actually have the capacity to meet these expectations or the flexibility to adapt them to their local context. The centralized nature of this approach overlooks the structural realities in these communities. In some cases, council is made up of part-time members who also hold full-time jobs; administrative support may be minimal, meetings infrequent. Asking these municipalities to implement complex accountability systems, especially if they're designed with large cities in mind, is not just unrealistic, it's counterproductive.

The government may argue that standardization is the key to fairness, but fairness doesn't come from treating every municipality the same. It comes from recognizing that different communities face different challenges and designing legislation that supports them accordingly.

We've already heard from AMO, as I mentioned, who have raised this exact concern. They have warned that this bill does not adequately reflect the diversity of Ontario's municipal governments, and they flagged that imposing rigid standards through regulation risks making accountability harder to achieve, not easier.

So, in short, Bill 9 needs to strike a better balance. It needs to support consistency without sacrificing flexibility, because when legislation ignores local realities, it stops being a tool for change and starts being a barrier to progress. Accountability should be real, accessible and practical. It should be a standard we lift municipalities up to and not one we impose from above without the tools to meet it.

Another area where this bill raises serious concerns is in its approach to the removal of municipal councillors following confirmed misconduct. One of the most significant changes in Bill 9 is a new provision that allows Ontario's Integrity Commissioner to recommend that a councillor be removed from office in cases of serious and harmful breaches of the code of conduct.

On its face, this is a step in the right direction. Communities deserve accountability. They deserve assurance that when an elected official breaks the rules, especially in ways that harm others, there are real consequences.

But here is the problem: While the bill lays out the process, it builds a major roadblock to enforcement. Even after the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario has completed a formal inquiry and confirmed that a councillor's actions meet the threshold for removal, the recommendation must still be approved by a unanimous vote of all remaining council members, excluding the member under investigation, of course, and anyone disqualified due to conflict or absence.

That word "conflict" is left entirely undefined. What constitutes a conflict? Is it a financial interest? Is it a family connection, maybe a nephew being a fellow MPP? Is it a political alliance or a personal friendship? These are not rare scenarios at the municipal level. We saw two brothers on one council. Councils in small and mid-sized communities are often made up of people who have long-standing relationships, and I think that's been discussed throughout today in the debate.

Without clear definitions, "conflict" becomes a vague catch-all that can be inconsistently applied. This lack of clarity creates a serious structural problem. Without a clear definition of what constitutes a conflict, it's entirely unclear who can or cannot participate in the vote. Depending on how "conflict" is interpreted, a significant number of councillors could be excluded, making unanimous consent difficult, if not impossible. In practice, this means that even when serious misconduct is confirmed, the process to remove a councillor could be stalled or blocked entirely.

That is why being specific matters. If we're going to rely on councils to make these decisions, we need a framework that's not only fair but that is workable and not so easily derailed by ambiguity or interpersonal politics.

Unanimous consent: That's not just a high bar; it's an almost impossible one. In theory, the intent may be to prevent politically motivated removals or ensure fairness, but in practice, we know how councils work. Dynamics of personal loyalty, political alliances, internal dysfunction and community pressures can all influence how people vote. Even in cases where the facts are really clear and where harm is real, a single dissenting voice or even one

absence could allow someone who has violated the public trust to stay in office, and that is not accountability. That would be avoidance.

Councils that are already fractured or struggling may find themselves paralyzed, even when they want to act. And for communities that have experienced the fallout of council misconduct, where residents are watching closely, this kind of standstill will only deepen frustration and erode trust in the system.

This isn't a hypothetical risk; this is a real one. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has already raised this alarm, and they have flagged the unanimity requirement as a serious flaw. They are right. When a process is built to be so difficult to use, it stops being a tool and starts becoming a shield for bad behaviour.

It also leaves significant enforcement issues to regulation. The content of the code of conduct? To be determined. The specific thresholds for removal? Still unclear. The timelines for investigations? Also left open to interpretation. That matters, because if the government is serious about restoring trust, then the rules need to be laid out plainly and not buried in regulation that's subject to change at cabinet's discretion.

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One of the most troubling examples is how this bill treats investigations during election periods. As it stands, if an inquiry isn't complete by nomination day, it gets paused. If the timing doesn't line up, serious misconduct could effectively be swept aside and an official could go through an entire campaign and even be re-elected without the public ever knowing the full story. Accountability can't just be seasonal. It cannot be suspended just because an election is around the corner. That is not justice; that is a loophole. And that sends the wrong message that if you time it right, you can get away with it. So while the removal provision in Bill 9 is important and we recognize the value of having a mechanism to address serious wrongdoing, it needs to be strengthened, not undermined, by procedural roadblocks, vague language and delayed enforcement.

If we're asking municipalities to hold themselves to a higher standard, then we need to give them a system that works—a system that is fair, yes, but also functional; a system that upholds due process without becoming paralyzed by it; and, most of all, a system that the public can trust to protect their interests even when politics gets complicated. Because if the goal is to rebuild confidence in local government, then the process needs to be transparent, practical and rooted in reality, and as it stands, Bill 9 falls short of that mark.

And now I hand it over to my colleague.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** The member for Ajax.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I believe this is a really important and timely step towards strengthening accountability in our municipal government, this bill that we have in front of us. It's important that we do it now, that we don't delay on this.

Municipal councils play a vital role in our democracy; we all know this. I know many members in the chamber have sat on municipal councils. They're the governments, really, that are closest to the people. They're at the ground level and they really make decisions that affect our day-to-day lives. But with that authority comes a duty to act responsibly and to always serve the public interest. As municipal councils fall under our authority, we must also work to ensure the public has trust in municipal governance.

This is a very important bill that builds on the work from members that have taken place on this side of the House. It's truly a non-partisan bill that would send a very powerful message, I believe, if there is unanimous consent, unanimous support on second reading for it to move forward.

We must remember that council chambers are also workplaces, just like, actually, here in this chamber: It's a workplace as well. Councillors, staff and other officials go there. They do their jobs to serve the public. I look at this from the perspective of somebody who worked as a staffer on a municipal council on the political side, but I also look at this as someone who was a staff person on a public school board in a senior role where I had responsibility for board services, interacting with and working with school board trustees. Just like any other workplace, there must be standards of conduct and, most importantly, and the minister, I think, mentioned this in his leadoff, a safe workplace environment. When someone engages in serious misconduct, harassment, intimidation, threats, it puts others at risk; it really does.

When I worked for the school board, we had to have paid-duty police and security for a time at our board meetings and committee meetings, based on a situation that we experienced. It wasn't a very pleasant situation to have to deal with, to have to have paid-duty police at your board meeting because you don't know who's going to show up and you don't know who's going to be there at a school board meeting.

As a staff person at a school board or on a municipal council, you're sometimes put into an awkward situation when there's issues of misconduct. If you're the city manager, for example, or the CAO, you report to the council. I wish we were in a situation where everyone was able to govern themselves and just be good people and do the right thing. Sadly, that's not the case. If that behavior causes other councillors or staff to feel unsafe, disrespected, so that they stop attending meetings or fulfilling their duties, it's more than a personal issue; it becomes a democratic crisis. And democracy depends on participation: the participation of all of us, the participation of people in our communities.

So when people are driven out of public spaces by toxic behaviour, everyone loses. Just like in any other workplace, serious misconduct must have consequences. Losing one's position should be on the table, just as it is in any professional setting when someone creates an unsafe or a hostile work environment. This bill affirms that no one is above accountability, even in positions of public trust. To me, serving the public is one of the greatest responsibilities and privileges and honours that anyone in this

chamber can have, but at a municipal council and at a school board as well.

We often know that misconduct is often directed at those who have been historically under-represented in politics. Women, racialized individuals and members of marginalized communities, they are disproportionately affected by harassment and bullying in public life. So if we're serious about building inclusive, diverse governments, we must ensure that they're going to be safe places for everyone who's sitting in it.

Recently, we've seen some of the notable instances where behaviour has impacted the ability of councils to function effectively without distraction. I say that, "without distraction," because sometimes the individuals there or things that are happening, it turns into a distraction from the work that that municipal council is trying to do. We saw in the city of Pickering, they had to go to virtual meetings instead of attending council meetings in person. Think about that: They had to take that unprecedented step to do it to ensure the safety of their staff and their members of council.

We heard about the situation in Ottawa before. There's other examples as well in this province of improper behaviour that should have been investigated and dealt with, in my view, probably much more appropriately than the situation in which they were.

So this bill helps us move in that direction by giving integrity commissioners and municipal councils the tools to stand up for a safe and respectful workplace culture. It gives councils the right to remove a member under specific and very serious circumstances. It is a reasonable and necessary power, I believe, in this day and age—and it's unfortunate to have to say that, but it is—for elected bodies to have.

I know there's a little bit of a debate of whether it should be up to a municipal council or a judge or another process, but in some ways, I do believe that we shouldn't let perfection be the enemy of good. That's why I support this bill and encourage its unanimous approval in this chamber, because it will be a powerful message: that all of us will not tolerate and accept that kind of behaviour in any workplace.

When a councillor's actions fundamentally violate the trust of their colleagues or their community, we shouldn't be powerless to respond, and I support the built-in safeguard of having the Ontario Integrity Commissioner review these serious cases. They're removed from the situation. They're not connected from the municipal council, and they're making an unbiased opinion and viewpoint as to what should happen. Having a high bar for action is critical, and having transparency and accountability built into the process as well—I think these kinds of reports, when they come forward, they shouldn't be in camera. They should be out in public when it is a clear recommendation of the report there. Everyone should have to and be able to see what the situation is.

I like the fact that there's standardization across municipalities, because integrity commissioners—well, in a small municipality, you're going to have one integrity commissioner that's working with multiple. So having that consistency, I think, is a really important thing.

I appreciate, during the lead-off debate, the government has indicated that it will be going to the committee process. It's important that we get this right, because it's a very, very, very serious matter. It's about protecting the integrity of our democratic institutions and the people that we serve within them, and encouraging more people to get involved in the public life. It shouldn't be a barrier; people should want to be able to do it and not have to worry about situations like this happening.

But we should also recognize that being in public office is not a free pass for misconduct. It is not a free pass for bullying or harassment. Accountability matters in every workplace and especially in our halls of government.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** My question is for the member from Toronto—St. Paul's. The bill as I read it doesn't just introduce penalties; it creates a foundation for transparency, consistency and fairness across all 444 municipalities in the province. Isn't that what exactly the public expects of us? To the member.

**MPP Stephanie Smyth:** Again, it's about one-size-fits-all. It doesn't always work, right? Every council, 444 municipalities—I think there can be individual circumstances in all those municipalities with councillors, with situations, full-time, part-time. That's got to be taken into account. That's exactly the point I was making.

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**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank my colleagues from Ajax and Toronto—St. Paul's for their presentation on Bill 9. I think, across this House, we can agree that municipal councillors who are found to have breached codes of conduct and have serious allegations against them should have repercussions.

However, with this bill, for a councillor to be removed, it requires the findings of two integrity commissioners as well as a unanimous vote from a municipal council. Does that seem to be reduplicative to you?

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I think at the local level they're making a decision, the integrity commissioner. It's a serious one, so it goes to the Ontario Integrity Commissioner.

I think I understand the intention of saying, "Well, look, if you're all elected on a municipal council and this is, inherently, at the end of the day, still a political decision as well—that there should be unanimous vote." But I do see the position, frankly, on the other side that says, "Well, if it's good enough to go to the Ontario Integrity Commissioner, shouldn't that be good enough?"

So I see both sides of that, and that's why I hope when we get to the committee process we'll be able to flesh that out a bit more and have that conversation and probably do more consultation, as well, around it because I think it is something worth thinking about more. But I think, as I said in my remarks, I don't want to make perfection be the enemy of good as we work within a chamber of over 100 MPPs.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions?

**Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and through you to the member for Ajax. We

believe that the public deserves strong accountability. Now, when it comes down to it, we have to ensure that we have safeguards here. We want to ensure that power cannot be used for political reasons. I really think that's critical, because you can have personality conflicts.

At the end of the day, we want to ensure that only in extreme and well-documented cases will the consequence apply. That being the case, we believe that this legislation has a balance here. Now, my question to the member is, when so many residents have lost faith in local government due to ethical breaches and perhaps a lack of meaningful consequences, isn't it time that we show them that we take these issues seriously?

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I think my remarks spoke very much to that—that we need to act now. As my colleague from Toronto—St. Paul's said, it would have been great if we had legislation like this before. I know there were private members' bills in this chamber before. It would have been great, I think, if we had legislation like this, frankly, 30 years ago going back, from governments of all stripes. But here we are now, and I think we've got to uphold public trust in our municipal government.

When you see these types of behaviours, it forms part of a narrative. I can speak to my experience with a school board: That type of narrative distracted from the work that trustees were doing; it distracted from the work that staff was doing; and it distracted from the work of educating and teaching our children, because other people then thought that, "Oh, all these other weird things are happening at the school board," or if it was a municipal case, the same thing.

So I think we've got to uphold public trust. This is a very important way to move that forward, absolutely.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions? The member for Niagara.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Falls.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Falls—I was waiting for that. Sorry.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** A little water over a rock.

Listen, my colleague said that our party is going to support the bill. But you have to think of why you need a bill like this, quite frankly. I'm going to tell you, in some of the councils that I've dealt with over the years, if you didn't agree with the majority of council, they would kind of censure you in their own little way. They ignore you. They don't answer your emails. They don't treat you with the respect and dignity you deserve—because you are elected by that community. So I think a bill like this is good. I'm sure when it goes to committee, we'll certainly have some others say at committee.

My question to you: Do you believe it's a good idea to have a bill like this to make sure that all councillors are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve—because when they don't agree with the mayor or the council, they shouldn't be harassed in any shape, way or form. Just answer that question, somebody. Don't fight over it.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** The member from Toronto—St. Paul's.

**MPP Stephanie Smyth:** Right. So I think what's most important is, there is a unified standard at the council to deal with these situations and deal with the codes of conduct. We were talking earlier about how council is made up of all kinds of groups or bands and cliques. People get along or don't get along, but if I'm understanding the question correctly, unified conformity and a code of conduct is the best thing to deal with it all.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** My question is going to be directed to the member from Ajax. There has been broad, robust consultation with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, ROMA and NOMA, and in the course of that consultation, nowhere did they speak about a judicial review or the process of engaging and putting in place a judicial review. As I read the correspondence that AMO submitted in April of this year, there are other suggestions that they had, but the inclusion of a judicial review was not part of that process because they were satisfied with the checks and balances that already exist in the legislation.

So I'm interested in the perspective that I heard from the member from Ajax as well as the member from Toronto—St. Paul's on the importance of including that aspect without consideration or consultation—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Thank you.

The member from Ajax.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I thank my colleague from Whitby for asking that question. I think in this chamber my remarks were focused around—I think there is a little bit of disagreement in this chamber around whether it should be a municipal council making that decision or a judge making that decision, based on, I believe, previous private members' bills and conversations that have taken place. Frankly, I'm not sold either way on which way it should be.

That's why I think it's important that it does go to the committee process and that we have more of those conversations, because I think there are important perspectives that we all need to consider in this chamber. One of those could very well be: Well, if the Ontario Integrity Commissioner makes that decision, then should that just be it? Maybe that's one of the other areas as well, right? So I think we really need to think about what that looks like. I appreciate the question.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** The member from Nepean.

**MPP Tyler Watt:** As my colleague from Ajax said, it is an honour and a privilege to be an elected official, and Ontarians deserve to have that trust in their elected officials and make sure that any misconduct does lead to real consequences.

My question is for the member from Toronto—St. Paul's. You touched on this in your remarks. I'm wondering if you think the requirement for unanimous council approval to remove someone is too high or too low?

**MPP Stephanie Smyth:** Thank you for the question. It is a high threshold, absolutely. But you know what? That's intentional. Removing somebody from elected office should only happen in the most serious of circumstances and well-substantiated circumstances.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate?

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** Today I rise and stand in solidarity with The Women of Ontario Say No. They've done so much work to push back against workplace harassment, discrimination, conflicts of interest etc. I want to especially thank Emily McIntosh, who I met many years ago as a city councillor. When she was asked what motivated her for the years and hours of tireless work that she has done, she said, "I'm a woman. I deserve better and so do you." And that's the essence of this work: trying to make sure that everybody who goes to work every day deserves better.

I want to thank the MPP for Orléans for putting this forward. I want to thank the many city councillors and municipalities and councils—over 208 municipal councils approved this type of bill—AMO, ROMA, OBCM and AMCTO.

**2010**

I want to thank the government for bringing this bill back. I think it's an important bill, and I think it's a moment of solidarity when we can all rise together and appreciate a common goal. Like the government, I agree that we all deserve better. This is a worthy bill. This is needed—that any workplace needs to be safe, and it needs to be held to a higher standard. Elected officials need to be held to a higher standard.

I appreciate that this bill includes training for councils and integrity commissioners. It does have a process for accountability, but I do echo the calls of The Women of Ontario Say No, who are asking for some changes. I have sat in the social policy committee with many of my colleagues, and I've seen difficulty in putting amendments forward. I hope this is not the case. I hope this is an opportunity when we can take a bill that's not quite there yet and do it right the first time.

Let's look at the recommendations from The Women of Ontario Say No and their group and put these changes forward—changes like booting out vexatious claims that have plagued the school boards in my riding; making sure that we adjust the unanimous vote regime to make sure that it is more of a two thirds and doesn't include room for important issues to not be considered and important accountability measures to not be considered; and also to look at the work of the Integrity Commissioner and their recommendations as being justified as good steps forward.

I was so grateful in 2022 to be a municipal councillor, to put a motion forward for the city of Kitchener and have that approved. I think we see this being approved all across the province, so I'm glad for that coverage.

But for too many, this work has been traumatic. They've experienced oppression. People have left their jobs. There has been a high consequence for this lack of accountability, and this is not okay.

So I ask the government: Please consider these amendments. Thank you for bringing it forward, but let's keep going to the finish line to make sure we get it right the first time.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Questions? The member from Perth—Wellington.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Correct answer, Speaker. You won't have House duty tomorrow.

To the member from Kitchener Centre, thank you for your very brief remarks this evening. I know you only had a moment of time, but I was just wondering: The two other opposition parties in this place want it to go to a judge. Does the Green Party want this to go to a judge instead of council? I'm just wondering if the member opposite could answer that.

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** I think the words of The Women of Ontario Say No are that when we look at a council as if it were a jury, all of those people would be cast away as jurors. I think we have to really look at the bias in a council when it comes to their ability to be unbiased and impartial. When we think of juries, they need to be unbiased, they need to be impartial. This is a politicized issue. We wouldn't expect this of any other HR decision.

I do think that we should trust in the integrity commissioner and their judgment. They are experts. They go through due process. They have details. Many councillors are not experts in this field, so I don't necessarily believe that they'll make decisions in a way that's not biased or political.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** The member from Ottawa Centre.

**MPP Catherine McKenney:** Thank you to my colleague from Kitchener Centre. I have a very straightforward question: Do you think that there is a risk in women not coming forward if they feel that the bar is too high, that a likely unanimous vote by a council is unlikely? Do you see that there would be a risk that we would be allowing this type of abuse to continue?

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** [*Inaudible*] colleague from Kitchener South-Hespeler. We're trying to fix how we deal with intimate partner violence. This is the crux of this bill. A lot of the misogyny and harassment that's happening is rampant in our society. Misogyny is going up. I think The Women of Ontario Say No say we should have protections for whistle-blowers.

Let's say somebody comes forward. We have a bar that is ridiculously high, because we know that in a lot of these councils, somebody plays baseball with somebody or somebody is related to somebody else. These are small towns, medium towns and big towns. There are a lot of relationships on there. There's a lot at stake for one person that they might say, "You know what? I'm going to give them the benefit of the doubt."

All of it is a waste. We are wasting taxpayer dollars, we're losing trust and, ultimately, it could affect somebody's employment, cause them traumatic harm. They've already been through a trauma, and we know with sexual violence, for example, when people go through the process and it's not done properly, you've retraumatized people and, ultimately, people lose faith in the system.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Question?

**Mr. Tyler Allsopp:** I really appreciate the opportunity to speak on this. As a former municipal councillor, I've

certainly seen how municipal councils work, how integrity commissioners work. I know that we all want to emphasize the importance of professionalism in the workplace and making sure that everyone feels protected when they come to work. I know that's something that's shared by all members of the House.

One of the questions that I have is this feeling that maybe council wouldn't get a unanimous decision after two different integrity commissioner reports identified that a problem occurred. We know that councillors are held accountable by the voters. Can you foresee situation where two separate integrity commissioner reports would come out and then municipal councillors would not vote in support of those, knowing what that would mean for them come election time?

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** One hundred per cent. It has happened. I don't need to imagine it. Please talk to Emily McIntosh; she'll tell you. I don't have to imagine it. It has happened. And not only—

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Aislinn Clancy:** Yes. And we know that we can't wait for four years. If you voted for somebody, you think they're person A, and they get charged with a really horrific crime and they're getting sentenced and put to jail, or they've been bullying the people in their workplace, my perception of that person has changed. We need some accountability to make sure everyone has the right to go to work and stay safe.

So we need something in the interim of the four years to make sure people get—it doesn't have to mean they lose their seat, either. Emily McIntosh is not saying that. She's saying let's create a host of measures so that the crime and the punishment match. We're using this one example of losing their seat, but we know the accountability measures should be varied to fit the crime.

But, yes, I don't need to imagine it; it has happened.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Seeing no further debate, Mr. Flack has moved second reading of Bill 9, An Act to amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in relation to codes of conduct. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

All those opposed, please say "nay."

I declare the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

*Second reading vote deferred.*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** Orders of the day?

**Mr. Steve Clark:** No further business, Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Laurie Scott):** There being no further business, the House is now adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.

*The House adjourned at 2018.*





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<b>Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)</b>	Willowdale	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et des Jeux
Ciriello, Monica (PC)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Clancy, Aislinn (GRN)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds— Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Darouze, George (PC)	Carleton	
Denault, Billy (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Dixon, Jess (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Dowie, Andrew (PC)	Windsor—Tecumseh	
<b>Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)</b>	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
<b>Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)</b>	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response / Ministre de la Protection civile et de l'Intervention en cas d'urgence
Fairclough, Lee (LIB)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	

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<b>Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)</b>	Nipissing	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce
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Firin, Mohamed (PC)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
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Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Leader, Third Party / Chef du troisième parti
<b>French, Jennifer K. (NDP)</b>	Oshawa	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première Vice-Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gilmour, Alexa (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Grewal, Hardeep Singh (PC)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Gualtieri, Silvia (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
<b>Hamid, Hon. / L'hon. Zee (PC)</b>	Milton	Associate Solicitor General for Auto Theft and Bail Reform / Solliciteur général associé responsable de la Lutte contre le vol d'automobiles et de la Réforme relative aux mises en liberté sous caution
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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<b>Holland, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin (PC)</b>	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products / Ministre associé des Forêts et des Produits forestiers
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
<b>Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)</b>	Dufferin—Caledon	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
<b>Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Trevor (PC)</b>	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et de l'Agroentreprise
Jordan, John (PC)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
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<b>Lumsden, Hon. / L'hon. Neil (PC)</b>	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	Minister of Sport / Ministre du Sport
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McKenney, Catherine (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
McMahon, Mary-Margaret (LIB)	Beaches—East York	
<b>Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)</b>	York—Simcoe	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
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Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
<b>Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)</b>	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	Deputy House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
<b>Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)</b>	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pinsonneault, Steve (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
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<b>Quinn, Hon. / L'hon. Nolan (PC)</b>	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security / Ministre des Collèges et Universités, de l'Excellence en recherche et de la Sécurité
Racinsky, Joseph (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
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Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Rosenberg, Bill (PC)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
<b>Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)</b>	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Chris (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)</b>	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smyth, Stephanie (LIB)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
<b>Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)</b>	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
<b>Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)</b>	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée des Petites Entreprises

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
<b>Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon. Vijay (PC)</b>	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué à la Santé mentale et à la Lutte contre les dépendances
<b>Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)</b>	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
<b>Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)</b>	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Attorney General / Procureur général associé
<b>Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)</b>	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Tsao, Jonathan (LIB)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Vickers, Paul (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Watt, Tyler (LIB)	Nepean	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
<b>Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)</b>	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	