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Mercredi
14 avril 2021

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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 14 April 2021 / Mercredi 14 avril 2021

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021, Bill 254, Mr.

Downey / Loi de 2021 sur la protection des élections en Ontario, projet de loi 254, M. Downey

Ms. Donna Skelly.....	12639
Mr. Terence Kernaghan	12642
Mr. Norman Miller.....	12642
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	12642
Mr. Mike Harris	12642
Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	12643
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	12643
Ms. Suze Morrison.....	12643
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	12646
Mr. Guy Bourgouin.....	12646
Mr. Will Bouma	12647
Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	12647
Mr. Norman Miller.....	12647
Mr. Mike Harris	12648
Third reading debate deemed adjourned	12649

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Doly Begum	12649
----------------------	-------

Elmira Maple Syrup Festival

Mr. Mike Harris	12650
-----------------------	-------

Kapuskasing

Mr. Guy Bourgouin	12650
-------------------------	-------

Small business

Mr. Randy Pettapiece	12650
----------------------------	-------

COVID-19 immunization

Mr. Faisal Hassan.....	12650
------------------------	-------

His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

Mr. Norman Miller.....	12651
------------------------	-------

Ramadan

Ms. Suze Morrison.....	12651
------------------------	-------

COVID-19 immunization

Mr. Robert Bailey	12651
-------------------------	-------

COVID-19 response

Mr. Roman Baber.....	12652
----------------------	-------

Bank Act of 1871

Mrs. Robin Martin.....	12652
------------------------	-------

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	12652
Hon. Christine Elliott	12652

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	12653
Hon. Christine Elliott	12653
Hon. Monte McNaughton	12653

COVID-19 immunization

Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	12654
Hon. Christine Elliott	12654

COVID-19 immunization

Mr. Norman Miller.....	12655
Hon. Christine Elliott	12655

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Doly Begum	12655
Hon. Christine Elliott	12656

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Mitzie Hunter.....	12656
Hon. Christine Elliott	12657

Shelter services

Mr. Norman Miller.....	12657
Hon. Jill Dunlop	12657

Laurentian University / Université Laurentienne

Mr. Jamie West	12658
Mr. David Piccini	12658
M. Guy Bourgouin	12658

Education funding

Mme Lucille Collard	12659
Hon. Stephen Lecce.....	12659

Mining industry

Mr. Norman Miller.....	12659
Mr. Dave Smith.....	12659

COVID-19 response

Mr. Terence Kernaghan.....	12660
Hon. Christine Elliott	12660

Small business

Mr. Mike Schreiner	12661
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	12661

Small business

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens	12661
Ms. Donna Skelly.....	12662

COVID-19 response

Mr. Roman Baber.....	12662
Hon. Stephen Lecce.....	12662

Correction of record

Mr. Jamie West 12662

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

Intimate Partner Violence Disclosure Act, 2021, Bill 274, Mrs. Stevens / Loi de 2021 sur la divulgation de la violence entre partenaires intimes, projet de loi 274, Mme Stevens

Second reading negatived 12663

Notice of dissatisfaction

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott) 12663

Royal assent / Sanction royale

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott) 12663

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Mr. Taras Natyshak 12663

Debate adjourned 12663

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Mr. Taras Natyshak 12663

Debate adjourned 12664

MOTIONS

Private members' public business

Hon. Paul Calandra 12664

Motion agreed to 12664

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Long-term care

Mme France Gélinas 12664

Autism treatment

Mr. Jamie West 12664

Documents gouvernementaux

Mme France Gélinas 12665

Employment standards

Mr. Jamie West 12665

Anti-smoking initiatives for youth

Mme France Gélinas 12665

Multiple sclerosis

Mr. Jamie West 12665

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021, Bill 254, Mr. Downey / Loi de 2021 sur la protection des élections en Ontario, projet de loi 254, M. Downey

Mme France Gélinas 12666

Mr. Robert Bailey 12668

Mr. Kevin Yarde 12668

Mr. Norman Miller 12669

Mr. Jamie West 12669

Hon. Doug Downey 12669

Mr. Mike Schreiner 12669

Hon. Bill Walker 12670

Miss Monique Taylor 12670

Mr. Will Bouma 12670

Mr. Will Bouma 12671

Mme France Gélinas 12672

Mr. Toby Barrett 12672

Mr. Jamie West 12673

Mr. Jim McDonnell 12673

Mr. Kevin Yarde 12673

Mr. Jim McDonnell 12673

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche 12674

Mr. Norman Miller 12676

Mr. Kevin Yarde 12676

Hon. Paul Calandra 12677

Mr. Jamie West 12677

Mr. Rick Nicholls 12677

Vote deferred 12679

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week Act, 2021, Bill 270, Mr. Pang / Loi de 2021 sur la Semaine de reconnaissance des aînés bénévoles, projet de loi 270, M. Pang

Mr. Billy Pang 12680

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche 12681

Mr. Will Bouma 12681

Miss Monique Taylor 12682

Mr. Rod Phillips 12683

Mr. Jamie West 12684

Mme France Gélinas 12684

Mr. Billy Pang 12685

Second reading agreed to 12685

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE / DÉBAT SUR LA MOTION D'AJOURNEMENT

COVID-19 immunization

Ms. Doly Begum 12685

Mrs. Robin Martin 12686

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 14 April 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 14 avril 2021

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Good morning. We're going to begin this morning with a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO ELECTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉLECTIONS EN ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 254, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to elections and members of the Assembly / Projet de loi 254, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les élections et les députés à l'Assemblée.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I am very pleased to rise in the House this morning to speak to a bill that would, if passed, make it easier and safer for people to vote or become a candidate, while at the same time protecting provincial elections against outside influence and interference. Bill 254, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, proposes to modernize elections in an effort to make the system more responsive to the challenges of the day. It's also an effort to be more responsive to voters' needs and the way they interact with their democratic institutions.

Mr. Speaker, our government wants to ensure that the electoral system continues to evolve to promote the vital role of individuals in elections and to ensure fairness in the electoral process for everyone. It is almost incomprehensible to think how much the world has changed over the past year because of the COVID-19 pandemic and how much we as a society have evolved and adapted over the past 12 months. Our government's Protecting Ontario Elections Act includes changes aimed at strengthening and safeguarding Ontario's electoral system. We are dedicated to ensuring Ontario's process is safe and accessible to everyone, whether you're casting a ballot, running for office, volunteering in your local riding or working with Elections Ontario. Our government is committed to keeping our elections safe, fair and efficient.

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has proven that now, more than ever, we need to protect and modernize our electoral system to meet urgent and unanticipated challenges. The Protecting Ontario Elections Act would, if passed, protect

against threats such as the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The provisions in this legislation would heighten our preparedness for the impacts of the pandemic, and the proposed changes would make it easier to cast a vote safely at advance polls or on election day.

The proposed changes would put individuals at the centre of the electoral process. They would impose safeguards against under-regulated third-party advertising and they would flag irregular campaign spending and collusion. Our government firmly believes voters in Ontario should determine the outcomes of elections. We believe voters should not be unduly influenced by big corporations or unions or American-style political action groups. The proposed reforms build on the Ontario Legislature's decision in 2016 to ban corporate and union donations to political parties. This legislation would not change who can make political contributions. Corporations and unions remain banned from making political contributions in Ontario. We believe Ontarians' vital voice in election campaigns should be protected. This, again, will ensure individuals remain the focus of our electoral process.

Mr. Speaker, over 19 key amendments have been proposed in this legislation. Fair, accessible and safe elections are the cornerstone of a free and democratic society. As Ontario continues to grow and evolve, we need to protect the electoral process. Over the past year, COVID-19 has underscored how critical health and safety is in all aspects of our lives. The impact of COVID on every one of us living in Ontario will never be forgotten, but our government has taken bold steps in response to these challenging circumstances. We took decisive action to keep Ontarians safe while continuing to maintain the administration of justice. Through persistent innovation and collaboration we moved our justice system forward by decades—by decades—in just a matter of months.

Last fall, we in Canada watched the turmoil surrounding the election campaign in the United States. Amid a global pandemic, American voters cast aside their concerns about the threat of the coronavirus and stood in long lines at the polling stations. In some areas, voters were willing to wait in lines up to eight hours to cast a ballot.

To make it more convenient and safer to vote in a COVID-19 environment, our government wants to increase the number of flexible advance polling days from five to 10. It would reduce the number of people inside a polling station at any one time. It would also make it easier for shift workers and others on a rigid work schedule to cast their ballot. We have taken the advice recommended by Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer in his special report on election administration and the COVID-19 pandemic,

and that is why we are proposing to increase the number of advance polling days from five to 10.

In an effort to ensure that individuals remain at the centre of the electoral process, we want to double the amount individuals can donate from \$1,650 to \$3,300 a year. This would include donations to a candidate, constituency association, leadership contestant or political party. We want to bring Ontario in the middle of the pack across Canada, compared to other provinces, by doubling the amount individuals can donate to any candidate or any party. Our government believes this change would enhance the voice of individual Ontarians in election campaigns. This is part of our plan to make elections in Ontario about the individual. This new spending limit would still be significantly lower than limits in Alberta, Manitoba and Nova Scotia. Saskatchewan and Newfoundland have no annual political contribution limits.

As a result of the impact of COVID-19, we would extend the per-vote subsidies each party typically receives in an election until the end of December 2024. The Legislature repealed this section of the Election Finances Act prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of the reason for that reform, which was debated at the time, was an expectation that political actors would increase their engagement with the voting public. But COVID-19 has created sudden and significant barriers to increasing voter engagement, and difficulty even maintaining the previous levels of engagement. Party and riding associations have not been able to interact with their constituents in the same way they had been able to before the pandemic, but we believe the subsidy needs to be extended due to the financial impact of COVID-19. This change will help our democratic institutions be involved in Ontario's government-led COVID-19 recovery.

We are proposing to extend third-party advertising spending limits from six to 12 months prior to an election period. These proposed changes would strengthen restrictions on third-party advertising by extending the spending time limit. Third parties can determine how many ads they run during this period.

We all watched the election turmoil last year south of the border. We want to guard against that kind of chaos from happening right here in Ontario. We want to ensure that American-style political action groups don't dominate a dialogue that drowns out the voices of individuals. One thing we can all agree on is that we don't want our politics to become as adversarial as it is in the United States.

0910

Mr. Speaker, attack ads funded by faceless political action groups, pop-up organizations, unions and corporations fuel the bitterness many people feel about politics. We want voters to make their decision based on what each party stands for, a decision based on the party's record.

The changes our government is proposing are necessary. It's troubling that a third party can spend unlimited funds for such a long period of time with no intermittent reporting at all. Elections Ontario has reported that the scale of third-party advertising in Ontario is larger than it is at the federal level. Ontario is the only province in

Canada where third-party spending is measured in the millions of dollars—not in the thousands but in the millions of dollars.

During the last provincial election campaign, 2018, including the six months prior, third parties—third parties—spent over \$5 million. The longer outside organizations are permitted to spend unlimited amounts of money on political advertising, the more Ontario is at risk of dangerous, unchecked influence on elections.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this change is about putting Ontarians at the centre of the electoral process. Our government wants to clearly define collusion. Currently, collusion can only be established where it can be proven that a third party's advertising has been done with the knowledge or consent of a political party or a candidate. That being the case, third parties can exert an inordinate level of influence on Ontario elections by coordinating messaging with political parties. Our government wants to strengthen and clarify the rules to guard against the threat of collusion between parties, candidates, third parties and outside entities in our electoral process.

These proposed rule changes include, more specifically, sharing of information, common vendors, common contributors and use of funds from foreign sources. These changes would help guard against third parties coordinating messaging with political parties. They would add new safeguards against irregular campaign spending and collusion.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that politicians and voters are more active now than ever before on social media, yet there are no clear rules in Ontario for how social media is to be used by members of the provincial Legislature. It's critical to have clear rules established on social media activity, including activity during an election campaign. Our government is proposing amendments to allow members of provincial Parliament to maintain the same individual social media accounts before, during and after a writ period.

The proposed legislation would also empower the Legislative Assembly to make the first set of rules for how social media should be responsibly used by members of provincial Parliament. This change would be the first express recognition in Ontario law that members of the assembly may use social media to reach the public, their constituents, supporters and followers.

While the Integrity Commissioner has the authority to apply some existing rules to social media activity, there are no comprehensive rules to guide members and assist the commissioner regarding social media activity. This is a matter that the current and former integrity commissioners have recommended be addressed by the Legislative Assembly itself.

These provisions will clarify that an individual member does not need to maintain entirely separate social media accounts. If passed, the legislation will allow members to maintain a single social media presence, and it will allow members to post a wide range of information, as long as they comply with the rules of that activity.

The Integrity Commissioner will continue to be responsible for ensuring that members comply with any

new rules for social media activity at the time of posting. The Members' Integrity Act sets out a process for any member to request the commissioner to investigate a potential breach of the act. This could include questions about inappropriate social media posts and inappropriate activity.

All members will have to continue to abide by existing rules regarding the permissible use of government resources. Ministers and their staff will have to continue to follow rules regarding the political activities of public servants and government social media guidelines. Our government wants to pave the way for the Legislature to set other rules around social media activity.

Mr. Speaker, the term "spot audit" refers to financial audits of candidates, leadership contestants and parties that occur after an audit has already been submitted and deemed sufficient. For parties and candidates, audited financial reports must be submitted annually and after each campaign. These reports are then reviewed by Elections Ontario. Spot audits to reopen and reinvestigate financial statements that have already been audited, closed and approved are burdensome, onerous and an unnecessary duplication. We want to remove this red tape for all members and parties within the Legislature.

Our government wants to provide the Chief Electoral Officer strong enforcement tools to drive compliance. We are proposing the need for broader administrative penalty powers. Penalties could be imposed for offences such as exceeding spending limits, failing to register, releasing election surveys on polling day and failure to submit other reports. Presently, the Chief Electoral Officer must report minor infractions such as political advertising not containing the name of the party or the third party that paid for the ad to the prosecutors in the Ministry of the Attorney General. The criminal law division of the Ministry of the Attorney General then decides whether or not to prosecute. Our government's proposed amendment would follow federal precedent by allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to authorize the use of administrative monetary penalties for specific violations. Alberta and BC use administrative penalties as a way to drive compliance within their election legislation.

A number of infractions would be addressed through administrative monetary penalties. In most cases, the fines are up to about \$1,500 for an individual and \$5,000 for a corporation or other entity. The penalties would be higher for infractions such as political advertising appearing during a blackout period, political advertising without disclosing the source or having no authorization and for failing to register as a third party. By empowering the Chief Electoral Officer to prosecute minor violations through administrative monetary penalties, our government is ensuring that all violations are dealt with in a fair and efficient manner.

Mr. Speaker, I participated in the public hearings at committee for this legislation, and I'm proud that we made a number of amendments at committee with respect to the administrative monetary penalty scheme. First of all, we will ensure that these penalties can be appealed. Second,

we will ensure that the Chief Electoral Officer believes on reasonable grounds that an infraction has taken place prior to administering a penalty. Third, the Chief Electoral Officer will have to administer a penalty within two years of discovering that there was an infraction, as opposed to having absolutely no time frame in place.

Currently, independent members of provincial Parliament do not have the same ability or resources as political party candidates to keep campaign surpluses or fundraise outside of writ periods. Our government is proposing to level the playing field by allowing independent incumbent MLAs to form constituency associations, as they do in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. These changes would provide all elected sitting independent members of provincial Parliament with access to constituency associations and related benefits. The benefits would include fundraising outside of election periods, qualifying for constituency association voter subsidies and keeping surpluses. These changes, if passed, would make it easier for independents to participate in elections, and it would ensure that individuals remain at the centre of the electoral process. These changes would apply to members who were elected under a party banner and are now independents, as well as future candidates who are elected as independent members.

Our government is committed to keeping pace with emerging technologies and threats. We are empowering the CEO to form an advisory committee to establish guidelines on voting equipment and vote-counting equipment. The committee would include representatives from each registered party in the Legislature and experts in the field.

0920

Now, some may ask why we are proposing these changes so close to an election. Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has underscored the importance of ensuring that elections are accessible and safe. Our government is responding to those concerns by making it easier and safer for people to vote, to become a candidate and to protect provincial elections against outside influence and interference. These proposed amendments will help modernize the province's electoral process and ensure it is updated to meet urgent challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The legislative changes will help ensure individuals remain at the heart of Ontario's electoral process.

We believe the legislative changes that we are proposing would safeguard Ontarians' voice in campaigns and fortify the integrity of the elections process. We strongly believe that individual voters in Ontario should determine the outcome of elections. There should be no undue influence by pop-up organizations, deep-pocketed conglomerates or faceless political action groups. This proposed legislation would provide responsible protections that would ensure the size and scale of third-party organizations do not drown out the voices of individuals who stand openly and transparently behind their convictions.

The essential voices of individuals should be protected. People are at the centre of the political process. They are

at the heart of democracy in Ontario. People form the backbone of our communities. Their spirit and energy drive our economy. People should determine the political direction of Ontario at the ballot box. Mr. Speaker, our proposed changes would reassert the fundamental role of these individuals and put them at the centre of the electoral process.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's time for questions and responses.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook for her presentation.

In hearing from this government, we keep hearing them use the term “American-style politics,” which is rather strange when we heard the Premier himself dedicate his devotion to Donald Trump. And back in 2018, during the election, many attack ads about NDP candidates were printed by the Conservative Party, calling us names.

My question for the member: At a time when the province is burning, hot spots like London are being ignored, ICUs are getting overwhelmed, vaccines are being left in freezers and people are dying, does the member think that this survival-of-the-richest bill is an effective use of the chamber's precious time?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question. We believe that this is important legislation because we are about a year away from an election and we are in the midst of a pandemic. We believe it is absolutely imperative that Ontarians have the ability to cast a ballot at the ballot box. They need access, the ability to safely vote. We have extended the period to vote prior to an election from five to 10 days. During this pandemic, when people are concerned about their safety, we are putting in every possible measure to ensure that they have the ability to cast a ballot and that the ballot that they cast is not going to be influenced by outside third-party organizations that you referred to. We believe it's important that their ballot count, and that's why we are introducing this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for her speech. During the clause-by-clause stage at committee, our government introduced a number of amendments with regard to the administrative monetary penalty scheme. They were based on the suggestions from some of the people who came before committee: Mr. Guy Giorno as well as Democracy Watch. I wonder if the member might be able to highlight some of those amendments that were made based on the folks who came before committee.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Of course, I'd be delighted to reference these particular changes that were made during committee. There were three key amendments that were made at committee which will make the system more fair, more transparent and aligned with other jurisdictions. First, the amendments will allow monetary penalties to be appealed to the Superior Court of Justice, which aligns with the approach in Alberta. Second, the amendments will require the Chief Electoral Officer to believe on reasonable grounds that there was an infraction prior to

administering a monetary penalty, which aligns with federal practices. Third, the amendments will require the Chief Electoral Officer to administer a monetary penalty within two years of discovering there was an infraction.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Thank you to the member from Flamborough–Glanbrook. I don't think the member answered my colleague from London North Centre's question, which was very important. We are in the middle of a pandemic.

Let's talk about how you talked about accessibility and fairness to voters. We know this bill doesn't address the crisis we have in voting and that is, people travel far to vote. Are you going to make every building a polling station to make it accessible for every single person to vote? Are you also going further, to make Sunday an election day?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you for the question. We need to make sure that all of the process is accessible and safe to all Ontarians. So we are making and providing these proposed changes in this bill. Elections are a fundamental element of our democracy and it is essential that we protect our elections. We want to be prepared for any eventuality.

We saw the chaos in Newfoundland. British Columbia and New Brunswick have run elections in the COVID-19 era that have moved more smoothly, but you know that in the last two provinces we saw a sharp rise in cases. Speaker, we looked at the experiences of BC and New Brunswick and learned about what happened at the advance polls. We agree with the Chief Electoral Officer that increasing opportunities of advance polls will help maintain physical distancing and provide reassurance to people who may not feel comfortable lining up on election day, giving more Ontarians greater options.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: Good morning. It's great to be back here in the Ontario Legislature.

My question to the member: You talked quite a bit about advance polling. When we look at what's happening with the pandemic, I think it's obviously very important that we look at ways that we can make things more accessible to people, be able to help them get out and vote. I was hoping maybe she can touch a little bit more on what she thinks this will mean to the people of Ontario.

Ms. Donna Skelly: As many of us have probably experienced in our political careers, often people will call our constituency offices or our electoral offices—our campaign offices—and they will share frustration with an inability to cast a ballot prior to election day at an advance poll, or an inability to even get to their polling station. I think that the changes that we are suggesting in this proposed legislation address many of those issues that were raised, certainly in my experience in my previous campaigns. We want to remove all of those barriers so that everyone in Ontario who is eligible to vote—and I would encourage everyone who is eligible to cast their ballot—is

able to. That means providing barrier-free access and giving them the assurance and the opportunity to cast a ballot safely and conveniently.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Here we are on April 14, 2021. It's about 9:30 in the morning and my team will be going to the voicemail in my constit office, and it's going to be full. It's going to be full of voices with stress and anxiety and fear. Why? Because here we are at Queen's Park in this House debating elections, worrying about if we're going to get re-elected or if we're going to have finances in our war chest.

Speaker, my question to the presenter and the government on the other side: On April 14, 2021—in the midst of the third wave; ICUs are packed, at the brink of closing the doors; people are dying—why is this government looking after their paycheque, re-election? The answers are not crystal clear to these citizens on why they're not answering their phones to small businesses, to people that are educators, to parents.

0930

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm pleased to respond to that question. Actually, we are answering the phones. I answer calls from people right across Hamilton, residents in Hamilton Centre. I'm dealing with one right now because they can't seem to get an answer from the representative from Hamilton Centre. I can share that with you afterwards. I deal with constituents from Hamilton Mountain. I deal with constituents from Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas because they tell me they simply can't get anybody to pick up the phone.

When it comes to dealing with small business, I'd like to remind the member, I have dealt with a plethora of people, including BIAs in Hamilton Mountain and across Hamilton Centre who have come to me to help them fill out their forms because there isn't one reference on their members' websites telling them how to get financial assistance. We can do two things. Maybe members opposite should do the same.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's interesting, some of the facts and realities around here. Maybe the members opposite don't know, but there is an election next year, and it is our responsibility to make sure that we're ready for it and the people of Ontario have the things that they need.

Speaker, we know that COVID-19 has impacted and will impact elections across Canada and around the world. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of ensuring that our provincial elections in Ontario are safe and accessible, including for northern and rural Ontario. Can my colleague please speak on the changes to advance polling periods and where the proposals came from?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'd love to respond to that query. First of all, we had extensive consultation, and we were listening to recommendations put forward by the Chief Electoral Officer and previous recommendations in his

previous report in the fall. We have compiled those proposals and those recommendations and included what we felt was important coming up to the election, which is, as the member stated, a year away. We want to ensure that during the COVID-19 pandemic people have safe access to polls and are able to and feel comfortable casting a ballot.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Suze Morrison: It's an honour to rise today and speak to the Protecting Ontario Elections Act. This is the second time now that I've spoken to the bill, and my thoughts haven't changed a whole lot, because the bill hasn't changed a whole lot as we've seen it come back to this House for the next debate.

Speaker, right now our communities are in crisis. The latest stay-at-home order has been devastating for families, for local businesses. People are on the brink right now. Every day, we're hearing heartbreaking stories about overwhelmed ICUs and about families and young people in hospitals and on ventilators. I just got a message from my staff, maybe five minutes ago. They'd seen a post come through on our Facebook from a physician who is now having conversations with their college about how physicians are going to be supported when they have two patients who need a ventilator and there's one ventilator left in the hospital. That's where we're at right now in the province: making decisions about who lives and who dies when our hospitals are at capacity. Instead of focusing every minute we have in this chamber on how to address the third wave that's before us, we're here talking about increasing donation limits in our Election Act so that our Conservative and Liberal colleagues can pad their war chests for the next election that we're about a year out from. I think it's absolutely shameful.

Speaker, the Premier knew that this third wave was coming. Experts have been warning this government for months. But instead of investing in the public health protections that we need and protecting the people of Ontario, we've seen this government continually cut public health, cut our health system, cut the protections that folks need. We need to be doing more right now to keep everyone safe. We need to be investing in the measures that we know are going to work. We need to be investing in workplace testing. We need to be investing in paid sick days and more supports for small businesses. But, instead, like I said, we are using our very, very precious time in this House to move forward government legislation that doesn't address the third wave that we're in.

This bill that has been brought forward by this government doesn't include a single thing to address the pandemic or a plan for recovery or a plan for rebuilding, a plan to keep workers safe. That's the only thing that we should be prioritizing in this House right now. Honestly, the priorities are just so backwards, and all we're doing is leaving the people of Ontario behind right now.

Queen's Park is supposed to work for everyone in this province, not just those with money. It shouldn't matter how much money you can donate to politicians. No one's

voice should count any more in this House—but here we are debating a bill that increases election contribution limits. That's not going to help people get through COVID-19. That's not going to help our small businesses that are on the verge of closing. That's not going to help us deal with the ICU capacity issues that we're about to face, the life-and-death situations we're asking physicians to make: the triaging of who gets a ventilator, who gets to breathe. That's where we're at—that's the tipping point we're at right now.

Speaker, ensuring that Ontarians have a voice in this chamber is especially important right now as we consider the experiences of Ontarians who are surviving this pandemic. Particularly, I think of the families of long-term-care COVID victims, of health care workers who are putting their lives at risk every day on the front lines, and so many more whose stories need to be told in this chamber. Those are the stories that we need to be focusing on. Instead, those are the same voices that this bill is actually going to actively shut out of politics.

Because, at the end of the day, this bill is about money. It's not about getting money to the people that need it the most right now, the folks that have lost their jobs, that haven't been able to pay their rent in months, the folks that are struggling to keep the lights on, keep food on the table and keep the Internet connected so their kids can participate in online learning. It's about helping people who want to donate ridiculous amounts of money to the Liberal and Conservative benches. Those are the voices that this government is prioritizing through this bill.

This bill does that by increasing the donation limit to \$3,300 a year and increasing the limit by \$25 every year after that. For those who aren't familiar with how political donation processes work, that's a maximum contribution you can make to your local riding association and then a maximum contribution to a political party; and in an election year you can make that donation again to your preferred candidate, to an active campaign—meaning that every individual person in a household in Ontario, once this bill is passed, will be able to donate almost \$10,000 in an election year. That's a lot of money. If you've got a well-off household of four and you can make that max contribution under the names of four people in your household, you now have the power to donate \$40,000 in an election cycle to the political party of your choice. That's a lot of political capital that we're putting in the hands of the wealthiest, most well-connected people. I don't know anyone—I literally don't know anyone—who could afford to donate \$10,000 to a political party. If you went through every name in my phone book, you wouldn't find a single person capable of donating \$10,000 to a political party.

When we think about who this disproportionately impacts, look around the room. How long have we been in this chamber and looked at faces that don't represent the people of this province? We still don't have gender parity in this chamber. Sure, we are the most diverse Parliament here in Ontario that we've ever had; it's getting better, but women in elected office still only hold—what are we at? I

think 35% of women in the chamber is the percentage right now. We have slightly more racial diversity. We have three Indigenous members now. Still, overwhelmingly, the folks in this chamber are the folks who have systematically benefited from power, who come from the sort of wealth and power to be able to succeed in this place.

When we've got new, young candidates who are coming from poverty, who are young women, who are young, racialized people, who are carrying student debt on their backs, who don't come from the old boys club or the old money in our communities, who don't have the financial capital networks to raise the money to fund their campaigns, they're the ones who get left behind. Those are the people who don't get elected into this chamber, because they don't have the money to run the campaigns, because they don't have the deep-pocketed networks of folks who can write a cheque on the spot for \$10,000. Those are the people who get left behind. It does not help us create a more diverse, more equitable, barrier-free path into politics for people who have been excluded for generations. It benefits people with power and people with money—the same old, same old.

0940

Speaker, this bill is a step backwards. Through this bill, we are returning to the era of scandalous, cash-for-access fundraising that we lived through under the previous Liberal government. These Conservatives are not doing much better. This is back when developers and big businesses would pay thousands of dollars to attend events where they would have exclusive access to the government. These incidents eroded public trust in our elected officials. It reinforced the idea that politicians could be bought and that they were more interested in spending their time at lavish fundraisers than actually working to make life better for people. If this government is truly interested in improving our democracy, we should not be returning to a time when those with the greatest financial means were able to have the most access through these political spaces.

It's certainly disappointing, but it's not exactly surprising. It certainly feels like this government has completely lost touch. We don't need more money in politics. Do you know where we need more money right now? We need more money in long-term care. We need more money for paid sick leave. We need more money in the pockets of personal support workers and developmental support workers, who are literally risking their lives on the front line of our health care system for barely more than minimum wage right now. Where is the pay increase for the PSWs and the DSWs?

We don't need more money in politics; that's the last thing we need. It's baffling to me that this is a priority of this government at this moment in time.

Speaker, like I said before, \$3,300 isn't exactly a small chunk of change, even under normal circumstances. But, right now, the idea of donating that much to a political candidate is just so out of touch with the reality of the financial crisis that most people in our communities are in.

People in my community are living below the poverty line, for the most part. We have some of the highest rates

of child poverty in Canada in my community of Toronto Centre. We have some of the highest food bank use across the province. The donations that folks are thinking about right now are not to political parties. If folks have got a spare \$20 or \$30 in their pocket, they're donating to the community organizations, the folks who are feeding people in our communities, to our shelters, to our women's shelters—the people who are out there providing supports to folks who are experiencing housing precarity, homelessness and seniors who are living in isolation. There are so many incredible organizations in my community out there trying to ease the suffering that people are feeling. For the most part, that's honestly where I see folks who have got any little bit of wiggle room in their budget, that's where their donations are going these days, rather than political donations.

Political contributions aren't what people are thinking about right now. If you were to ask anyone in my community—if I were to walk down the street in Toronto Centre, which is just a few blocks away, and stop anyone on the street and say, “Do you know that your Legislature right now is debating a bill to increase political donation limits to \$3,300 a year? Do you think that that's the priority that our Legislature should be working on when we've got case counts of upwards of 4,000 cases a day of COVID?” We're in a third wave. Schools are closing. We're on lockdown, and our ICUs are about to run out of capacity. Our shelters are overflowing. People are homeless. People have lost their jobs. Stop anyone on the street, ask them that question: “Do you think that's the priority that your government in Ontario should be debating in the Legislature today, right now?” I dare you: Go find me one person on the street who thinks this is the priority of the government—find me one. There are very real policy solutions that the government could be putting in place to make life easier for folks. It's not this.

Speaker, this bill is just completely out of place with the concerns that I'm hearing from folks in my community. People are exhausted; they're frustrated.

More recently, in the last week or so, they have become incredibly frustrated with this government's vaccine rollout. When this government made their announcement last week on Friday that vaccines would become available to all adults living in hot-spot neighbourhoods, immediately I started hearing from folks in the community who were eager to get their vaccines. I heard from retail workers who interact with hundreds of people a day and folks with underlying health conditions who have had to isolate from loved ones for over a year now. Getting their vaccine is the light at the end of the tunnel. It will take a huge weight off their shoulders.

Unfortunately, the excitement that folks felt quickly disappeared once they learned that the Conservative government actually had no plan to implement that commitment to open up vaccine access. No one had informed the city or public health or even the hospitals that they had to alter their vaccine rollout on a dime. We didn't receive any information about where to even send our constituents, who to reach out to, where to go. We still actually have no

idea how most people in my community are supposed to get this vaccine. Many of the folks I've talked to are incredibly frustrated. They're putting their lives on the line every day to support our communities, many as front-line, essential workers, and this government continues to fail them over and over and over again.

Experts have been telling this government we need to do more to end the third wave that we're in. We need paid sick days, we need expanded testing, we need greater accessibility to vaccine appointments, but this government continues to ignore the advice. We need to implement these measures in order to put this pandemic in our rear-view mirror. And I cannot say this enough: We need paid sick days for all workers in Ontario to actually do that.

What we don't need is to increase political contribution limits. It's that simple. I just cannot get my head around how this government thinks that is the most important priority. Speaker, paid sick days have been endorsed by mayors, by municipalities, by medical officers of health and public health experts, as well as the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. We know that paid sick days are vital to stopping the spread of COVID. They're key to addressing another lockdown, more outbreaks and stopping more businesses from closing.

This government has blocked every attempt my colleagues and I have made to expedite the passage of the NDP's bill for paid sick days, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, and voted against the bill at second reading. What we know, Speaker, is that COVID is spreading in workplaces. People are losing their lives because they went into work, they became sick with COVID and then became seriously ill, and all because they couldn't afford to take a day off work. They can't afford to stay home.

When that day off work means you may not be able to pay your rent at the end of the month and you're a single mom with two kids, what decision are you going to make? Are you going to risk your children becoming homeless because you can't afford a day off work, or are you going to talk yourself into it? You're going to say, “Oh, my throat hurts. I feel a little flushed today. I ate something funny the other day, it's probably nothing. I'm just going to grin and bear it. I'm going to go in. It's probably nothing. I'll be fine. I can't take the risk of missing a day's worth of pay.” And then the next thing you know, we have a workplace outbreak that has now cost our health system far more than a paid sick day would have.

That's the other piece I really don't think my colleagues on the other bench understand: We literally can't afford not to give people paid sick days. Our health system is on the brink—physicians are about to be making choices between who gets ventilators and who doesn't. Life-and-death choices are being made here, and all because this government can't find it in itself to prioritize actually keeping people safe. Instead, you're prioritizing increasing political contribution limits. The logic of it baffles me.

From day one, you guys have said you're the party for the people. For which people? Not for the workers who can't afford to stay home, not for the PSWs who are risking their lives.

0950

Ms. Doly Begum: Not for seniors.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Not for seniors who have died in long-term-care homes.

Interjection: Not for people on ventilators.

Ms. Doly Begum: Not for students.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Not for the people on ventilators. Not for the students. Any vulnerable person in this province—

Interjection: Parents.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Not for parents.

But you know who you are for in this bill? You're for the people who can afford to donate \$10,000 a year to a political party. You're for them. You're for the rich people, the well-connected people.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Developers.

Ms. Suze Morrison: You're for the developers and your deep-pocketed donors. Their priorities, you're incredibly invested in.

I see I'm just about out of time, but my challenge to my colleagues on the opposite bench is I wish you would find the same prioritization, the same compassion, the same empathy, the same drive that you have to prioritize the interests of the wealthiest in this province and put that energy into prioritizing what the people of Ontario need right now to get through this third wave. Prioritize investing in our ICU capacity. Prioritize paid sick days. Prioritize eviction protections and rent subsidies so we're not creating the largest homelessness crisis we've ever faced, on top of a global pandemic.

I really cannot stress enough the issue of the ICU capacity that we are about to see in this province, that we are already seeing. Physicians are about to be making decisions between who gets a ventilator and who does not. We are running out of ventilators and we are running out of beds in our ICUs. This third wave is coming down hard on all of us.

My ask to every member on the opposite bench: Come into work every day in this place and help us fight for the things that Ontarians need to keep them safe and get through this third wave. Stop bringing us bills like this that are about increasing political contribution limits in the middle of the pandemic. This is not our priority right now. This is not where we should be focused. This is not the work of this House.

Let's actually get to work to keep people safe and get through the third wave.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Time for questions and responses.

Ms. Donna Skelly: The member from Toronto Centre referenced the vaccine rollout here in Ontario. Mr. Speaker, as you know, our government is doing absolutely everything to ensure that every single dose of Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca that comes into Ontario is injected into the arm of a person who is eligible. But, as we know, and as the world is starting to understand, as we've seen on CNN just yesterday, the federal Liberal government has failed Canadians; it has failed Ontarians.

Mr. Trudeau had one job to do, and that was to get us vaccines, but he failed. We are short vaccines.

To the member from Toronto Centre: Do you believe that the federal government has done its job in delivering vaccines to Ontario?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you to the member from Flamborough—Glanbrook for the question. This isn't about jurisdictional ping-pong. It was your job to get the vaccines that you had into people's arms. Where are those vaccines sitting? They're sitting in freezers, not in arms.

Your sitting there passing the buck to the federal government is just like a game of hot potato. Stand up and do your jobs, get the vaccines into arms, get them out of freezers and stop the chaos with the vaccine distribution. People in my community can't get appointments to get vaccines because the demand is so high. You made this 18-plus announcement with absolutely no plan to actually get those vaccines out into our communities.

Do better. Don't just sit there and blame other levels of government. Do your job.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Next question.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I want to thank my colleague from Toronto Centre for your presentation. It was excellent. You mentioned that your office—and I believe all our offices are getting these calls about COVID and vaccinations, and they're concerned. They're stressed that they have to live through this, Mr. Speaker. You know, this is—

Ms. Donna Skelly: No vaccines.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Well, you should come up north.

Ms. Donna Skelly: There are no vaccines.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: No, there are vaccines. Just deliver them.

With that being said, this government is so disconnected—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please.

Wow, a well-behaved group of colleagues in this place, finally. I'll give you a fine reputation to live up to: I would expect that the noise level will stay suppressed, and we can continue with questions and responses.

I'll turn it back to the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay to ask your question.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: This government is so disconnected that we're dealing with contributions in the midst of a pandemic, where people are dying. Like we said, people are dying—between life and death. My question to you: What should we be dealing with right now in this House, with this pandemic?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much to my colleague from Mushkegowuk—James Bay for the question. If I could control the government agenda in this House, today I think we'd be debating paid sick days for all workers. We'd be debating a bill to raise the salary, the pay, for personal support workers and developmental support workers in the province. We'd be debating a bill on an eviction ban to protect folks from being forced out

of their homes in the middle of a pandemic. Those are the bills that an NDP government would be prioritizing if we had control over the legislative agenda of this House. Those are the priorities we'd be putting forward, not a bill to increase political contribution limits to almost \$10,000 in an election year.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, through you to the member opposite: I'm struggling to understand what I'm hearing in the House this morning. She said emphatically, when she was actually talking about the legislation that we're supposed to be debating this morning, that this is taking the rights away from Ontarians to have equitable access to elections. I would just like to get that on the record again, because she already stated, the member from Toronto Centre, that (1) she is against keeping the per-vote subsidy to help political parties, to keep them politically active in times of pandemic, and (2) she is against increasing the advance polling days from five to 10 days on a permanent basis to give more access to people in elections in Ontario.

Please answer that.

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you so much for the question from the member from Brantford—Brant. Prior to being elected, I had the great fortune of working with a group called Women and Politics in London; before I moved back home to Toronto, I was in London for a couple of years. That group really focused to identify and break down the barriers that keep women from elected office. Over and over and over again, the key thing that we have heard from every corner of this province and from every corner of the country is that financial contributions to a campaign, as a woman candidate, are a significant barrier to becoming elected for the first time in this province, and it is why we still, to this day, do not have gender parity in this House and have never once had gender parity in this House.

Making it harder for equity-seeking candidates to raise the funds they need to run winning, successful campaigns by returning to the old days when only old money and big money can finance winning campaigns, is not how we make it more equitable for women and particularly women of colour in this province to become elected.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to thank my colleague from Toronto Centre for her excellent presentation to talk about what we should be talking about in the middle of a pandemic, the issue of inequity—when we talk about a vaccine rollout, in my own community, to this day, we do not have a permanent vaccine facility.

To the member from Toronto Centre: I know it's very important to have paid sick days and PSW wages being raised. These are the important issues we should be talking about now, not reforming elections, which we are talking about. Would you be able to talk about the need for distribution for inequity, and to have communities like my community have places to have their vaccines, which we unfortunately don't have at the moment?

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Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you to the member from York South—Weston for the question. I think you've hit a really important piece, which is around the equitable distribution of the vaccine. This has been particularly poignant in my community, as we've gone through this business in the last week around the prioritized postal codes.

In fact, when the government's postal code list came out, I was quite shocked to learn that the Church and Wellesley Village was specifically excluded. All of the neighbouring postal codes were included. Our case counts were just as high in the Village as in the neighbouring postal codes. It was almost like the government had drawn a circle around the queer and trans communities in desperate need of vaccines in my community and excluded them from that list, which I find particularly interesting when you consider the historical context of queer and trans communities being actively left behind and abandoned by every level of government during the AIDS crisis.

Equitable vaccine distribution means you have to take into account those social inequities and those historical inequities that mean that certain populations and communities are disproportionately harmed by the decisions your government makes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for her comments. She did talk about making it easier for people to be able to come to this place, to run for elected office. Some of the recommendations or changes in this bill do that, including in the nomination process. I know when I was nominated, I don't think I spent \$100 on the nomination, but one of the changes in this bill, as recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, is to not require financial reporting for a nomination meeting. There's still registration required. That's meant to make it easier and simpler to be able to run for office, as well as a number of other recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer, including more advance poll days and the use of technology and reviewing that between elections. Does the member support these changes to make it easier to run for office?

Ms. Suze Morrison: Thank you to the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka for the question. I think back to my own nomination meeting and my own nomination bid, which was an exciting nomination. I actually won a tie at my nomination meeting; I don't know if anyone knows that. But I didn't find the process of the financial filings to be a barrier, particularly as a young woman running for the first time in my community.

What I did find to be a barrier was when I went through my address book in my phone and started asking people for money for the first time, which, as a young, first-time candidate, we all do. It's scary when you call people for money for the first time. The people who I had access to in my phone book as someone who had grown up in poverty, who didn't have a lot of family because of generational harm and the foster care system, who had

worked primarily in non-profit—with the people I could raise money from, I was lucky if I could find \$50, \$75, \$100 at a time. As a young woman running for office for the first time, I didn't have access to a single person in my phone who could cut a cheque on the spot for \$1,000. I think increasing the donation limits in this province—

Mr. Mike Harris: I just checked, and you have several.

Ms. Suze Morrison: I do now. I do now—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Time has expired. Sorry. Thank you.

Further debate?

Mr. Mike Harris: It is a pleasure to be here debating the Protecting Ontario Elections Act this morning in the Legislature. I think we've talked a little bit about what this bill does. If this bill is passed, it will make it easier and safer for people to participate and vote in elections, and I think all of us here in the House can agree that that's a great idea.

Electing our government is an underappreciated right that we all have here in Canada. Living in a democracy where we have the right to vote and participate in the electoral process is something that should never be taken for granted, Mr. Speaker. Now, is it perfect? No, not necessarily, but to quote Winston Churchill—which I think is an interesting quote—it is the worst form of government except for all the rest. Now, I'd argue that that might be a bit of an over-exaggeration, but democracy is strengthened when more people have the opportunity to have their say.

The changes we are proposing here will do exactly that, Speaker. Everyone here in this House today—even you, Speaker; even you—received a mandate from their constituents to represent them to the best of their abilities, and this is something I personally take very seriously. I am fairly familiar with our electoral traditions, having grown up in the halls of this building. I watched my father work hard to secure the vote of the people of Nipissing, then, later, the people of the entire province. A respect for democracy and the electoral process is something I have been raised to hold to the highest standard, which is why I am in full support of the measures in this legislation. These proposed reforms would strengthen our elections, guard against outside influences and protect the essential voice of each and every Ontarian.

We can't ignore what is happening in the province as we're debating this bill, and that is the COVID-19 pandemic. Back in 2018 when I was knocking on doors, I didn't imagine that I would be representing my constituents through the greatest challenge that our province has faced in generations. Never did it occur to me to mention the word "pandemic" on the doorstep, and yet here we are, 13 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, and we're still battling the third wave. As we continue to vaccinate record numbers of Ontarians every day, there is still some uncertainty about what the future is going to look like.

We've watched other provinces across this country hold elections as the terms of their governments came to an end, and just recently south of the border, as they had to navigate that challenge as well. COVID-19 has

highlighted the importance of ensuring that elections are safe and accessible. While I cannot promise what the world will look like in 2022, when we are scheduled to go to the polls, I can almost guarantee it will not look like any other election that any of us in this room have ever been part of.

The Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario has advised that we should increase the number of advance polling days. Currently, five days of advance polling is what is required by legislation. Passing this bill would increase that to 10. That is five more days that Ontarians can find their ways to the polls.

While I began my remarks emphasizing how important it is for all of us to participate in the electoral process, I don't think it is news to anyone here in this room that there is a large percentage of people in this province who just don't vote. In my riding of Kitchener-Conestoga, the turnout in our last election was slightly higher than the provincial average: 60% of people who were eligible to vote filed a ballot. In a year that saw the highest turnout in a decade, only six in 10 people in my riding went to the polls. Why don't those other four people in 10 come out? Well, Stats Canada did a survey following the 2019 federal election and found that 22% of non-voters said they were too busy and that 11% said they were out of town. That's nearly 30% of people who could have benefited from an extension in advance polling. But one thing I challenge all of us to do, should this bill pass, is raise awareness for these advance polling days, because there are some people out there who still don't realize that that is an option. Democracy works best when we all use our voice. It is the healthiest when the barriers of participation are broken down. Adding more days for Ontarians to go to the polls increases the accessibility and flexibility of our elections.

When people get to the polls and receive their ballots, they should be free to make the choice that they want, Speaker. That is a fundamental principle that I will gladly stand behind each and every day here in this Legislature. They should also have the confidence that the name they are selecting on the ballot is in fact the one that they are intending to vote for, not someone who has been shaped and promoted to them by third-party advertisements. We've seen how third-party advertisers can overpower the voices of individuals and shape the outcome of elections. These "American-style politics" are not something neither I nor anyone I know want to see take hold here in the province.

Just as our illustrious Attorney General has stated, I want to recognize that there is still room for third-party advertisers here in the province. It is a way for organizations that are not part of the party—that candidates can campaign to make an impact. They still have an important role to play, but they shouldn't overpower the candidate, who is out there knocking on doors and meeting people, whether it be face to face—probably via Zoom calls in the next election, potentially, if we can't get a good, steady supply of vaccines.

However, the level of activity we have seen in recent years and the amount of money these organizations have

spent certainly should raise some eyebrows. We need reasonable safeguards to protect the voices of individuals, especially since we are the only province in Canada where third-party spending is counted in the millions of dollars. In fact, in 2018, \$5 million was spent by third parties during the election and the six months prior.

1010

Political parties and candidates are required to be accountable for the funds they raise and to track where they come from, but the requirements are not—I repeat not—the same for third-party advertisers. Without basic safeguards, we run the risk of seeing third-party advertisers becoming the loudest voice in the room.

What we are proposing is that third-party advertising spending limits begin 12 months before an election instead of the current six. To be clear, we would also be maintaining the spending limit of just a little over \$600,000 and still allowing them to spend money during the writ period. This is a balance that would responsibly regulate third parties in between and during elections while ensuring that voters still have the loudest voice at the polls.

Members of this House will notice there have been amendments to this bill during the committee stage, and this includes requiring third parties to file interim spending reports to ensure they are complying with the spending limits. To further increase transparency, Elections Ontario will track spending online and publish those interim reports.

I also want to highlight some of the measures this bill includes for the independent members in this House because I think that's very, very important. Speaker, I know my time is wrapping up. I'd invite them to take part in debate today so that we can talk more about the impact that this will have on their ability to fundraise and prepare for the next election.

The rules around Ontario elections have long forgotten about independent members, and it's unfortunate. As it stands, independent members are not able to fundraise outside the writ period, and they cannot keep surpluses from their campaigns.

We have quite a few independent members of Parliament here in the Ontario Legislature. While I certainly do not agree with them on many points, I do believe they should have the ability to bring the voices of their constituents forward. I am not going to argue with them for representing their constituents if, in fact, that is what they're doing. Of course, the only way to find out if they have the mandate of their electorate is to see what happens at the polls, and that should be decided on a level playing field, not because of inequities in the system.

In this bill, we are proposing to extend the right to form a constituency association to all independent members. This means they would be able to fundraise outside of the electoral period and keep those surpluses, should they have them. They would also be eligible for quarterly allowances to their constituency associations.

Of course, all the rules of reporting and filing with Elections Ontario would still stand. This will give our fellow members of the Legislature the same opportunities

we here on the government benches and the members of the official opposition have.

This is not unprecedented, as we've heard our Attorney General explain. Three other provinces—British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan—allow for incumbent independent members to form constituency associations. This is just another way we are ensuring that the independent members of this Legislature can participate equally.

Our government House leader has prioritized ensuring independent members have the opportunity to ask questions and participate in debate. Like I said, we may not always agree with them; however, we need to respect their responsibility to represent their constituents and provide them with the opportunity to do so.

These proposed changes would go a long way to ensuring that they have a fair shot in 2022 and subsequent elections.

Another change being proposed that would make our elections fairer is allowing for the certification of candidates who register up to six months before the writ. This would give them the ability to open a bank account and be ready well in advance of an election. I'm surprised the opposition isn't talking about this change more, Speaker. It would give new candidates the opportunity to better prepare for an election and, by all accounts, it's a very, very welcome change.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Unfortunately, the time for debate this morning has expired. However, to the member from Kitchener-Conestoga: You do have time left on the clock, as well as the 10-minute question-and-response period afterwards. So when this bill is called back into the House again, you will have that opportunity.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Doly Begum: Most of the vaccine clinics, which are meant to be immunizing those who are facing the highest risk in our province, are only running during business hours, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. or 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. The hotlines set up for registration are also only running between these working hours. And the online registration, well, that's a complete mess.

The government has turned something as simple as securing a vaccination appointment into an unnecessarily stressful situation, Mr. Speaker. Not only do we not have enough available appointments, these limited hours are making it difficult for essential workers—the very people who are meant to be prioritized and protected—to find a time to get their vaccine.

Large cities like London and New York are running 24-hour vaccination clinics to ensure they can vaccinate as many people as possible. Advocates across the province, especially in the hardest-hit communities across the GTA, have been telling us that pivoting to a 24-hour vaccination

program is essential for an equitable and an effective vaccine rollout. Health care workers across this province have risen to the occasion to vaccinate our communities, and this will be no different.

People in communities like mine in Scarborough Southwest work multiple jobs, work odd shifts and simply cannot accommodate some of these hours. I am proposing that the Minister of Health set up a 24-hour vaccine clinic across this province, especially in hard-hit communities, along with equitable distribution of vaccines so that anyone who needs to get vaccinated in our province can get vaccinated without any barriers.

ELMIRA MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Mike Harris: We are in the middle of one of the sweetest times of year here in the province of Ontario, and that is maple syrup season. I have the honour of representing the riding—which you’ll know very well, Speaker—that hosts the largest maple syrup festival in the world, the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival.

Traditionally, this past weekend we would have seen tens of thousands of people come to downtown Elmira to celebrate and support the local producers in my riding and across Ontario, and for a great cause too, Speaker. All of the proceeds raised go back to the community through donations to local charities and non-profits. Over \$1.6 million has been raised over the past 56 years. In particular, Elmira District Community Living receives a significant portion of these donations, which goes to supporting their work with adults with developmental disabilities.

Unfortunately, last year, for the first time in the festival’s history, it was cancelled. This year, we were not able to get together in person, but, thanks to the hard work of the volunteers and organizers, my family and I were able to enjoy a wide range of virtual activities from the comfort of our home, like the maple taffy demonstration and sugar bush tour. While COVID-19 may be keeping us apart, community spirit is still alive and well in Kitchener–Conestoga, and I am so pleased that our traditions continue to live on, albeit a little bit differently.

With Ontario moving full steam ahead on the vaccine front, and pending any further supply delays from the federal government, I am very hopeful that next year it will be safe for all of us to get together on Arthur Street in Elmira for this special event.

KAPUSKASING

M. Guy Bourgouin: Aujourd’hui, j’ai l’honneur de me lever en cette Assemblée pour célébrer le 100^e anniversaire de la ville de Kapuskasing, mon chez-nous depuis 23 ans. Kapuskasing, which in Cree means “bend in the river,” sits on the Treaty 9 traditional territories of Mushkegowuk Cree.

The history of the town of Kapuskasing begins in the early 1900s with the opening of the lands for the trans-continental railway. After that period, the first paper mill and dam are built, and with the expected population boom, the provincial government commissioned a project for the

planning of the town. So Kap is the first provincially planned town, with the idea to promote healthy living and environmental and architectural harmony—truly, Kapuskasing owes its designation as Garden City and the Model Town of the North.

Bien sûr, l’histoire de Kap est marquée par l’industrie forestière et papetière, mais elle est aussi marquée par les travailleurs et travailleuses. Kap est une ville ouvrière, dont l’histoire du Kapuskasing Labour Council datant des années 1930, les événements tragiques de la grève de Reesor Siding en 1963, and the response of the community in the 1990s that ended in the purchase of Spruce Falls Power and Paper by the workers and the community.

Il va sans dire que Kap est une ville avec une grande population francophone datant des années 1960 et avec un grand lien avec les arts et la musique, avec la plus grande Saint-Jean hors Québec.

The pandemic may have forced Kap to celebrate virtually, but it didn’t take away our identity, our history and our future. Happy birthday. Bon 100^e, Kapuskasing.

1020

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Local small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our economy. This is true in every community I represent. They are employers, they are contributors and we cannot succeed without them, yet they have paid a high cost during this pandemic, many times over. Despite our government’s unprecedented support programs, many businesses have not survived, and many more are at risk unless conditions soon improve.

Last week, I received letters from members of the Stratford City Centre BIA. They raised many concerns:

- the immense challenge of planning around lockdowns and the costs they impose;

- the physical and mental health effects of trying to keep businesses afloat;

- retaining staff and maintaining their confidence; and

- paying the bills without income, just to name a few.

These challenges are not unique to businesses in Perth–Wellington. They are the daily reality for businesses across the province and beyond. Our government is responding with support programs like the Ontario Small Business Support Grant and, soon, the Ontario Tourism and Hospitality Small Business Support Grant.

I was very pleased that the government heard our call to support accommodation providers, travel agencies and others, but we also know that business operators just want to do what they do best: They want to run their businesses. No support program can replace that, nor can it replace what has been lost. I will continue speaking for local businesses at every opportunity. Their success matters to me—every single one in every single community. We cannot do without them.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I rise in the House this morning to speak to the situation in York South–Weston regarding

vaccines for our community. York South–Weston is a designated hot spot, and one of high risk. It is home to many hard-working essential workers and seniors who should not be neglected by this government's COVID response.

Very much like when we had to wait until September 28 for a permanent testing facility, we are now waiting for a permanent vaccine facility. Our residents need access to the vaccine, and that is why we didn't wait for the government to act; we teamed up with Humber River Hospital to help organize, register and distribute vaccines to seniors' buildings, places of worship and Toronto Community Housing. I would like to thank Barb Collins and Ruben Rodriguez from Humber River Hospital for their community leadership and for allowing us to assist in their creative endeavours to deliver vaccines.

We would like to continue with those efforts, but the government needs to increase the vaccine supply. I urge the government to deliver more vaccines and, as well, to finally establish a permanent vaccine facility that is badly needed by our community.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE PHILIP, DUKE OF EDINBURGH

Mr. Norman Miller: I rise today to pay tribute to His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. Beyond being a great support to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip made many contributions to Ontario, Canada and the world throughout his 99 years. Before marrying the Queen, Prince Philip served in the Second World War with the Royal Navy. Over the course of his life, Prince Philip was associated with 992 organizations all over the world. He was most interested in science and technology, the welfare of young people, education, the environment, conservation and sports.

Prince Philip leaves behind a legacy of outstanding service to society that reaches around the globe, especially through his Duke of Edinburgh awards, an international program founded in 1956 that encourages youth to develop to their highest potential in all areas of life. On June 5, 1985, during one of Prince Philip's, I believe, 38 visits to Ontario, he presented the Duke of Edinburgh gold awards to 100 young Canadians right here in the Legislature. I wasn't one of those award winners, but the next day, I was honoured to meet Prince Philip during a dinner at Ontario Place, which was hosted by my father, the Premier at the time.

On behalf of the people of Parry Sound–Muskoka, I want to express our condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and to all of the royal family. Prince Philip will be remembered fondly by people whose lives he touched here in Ontario and around the world.

RAMADAN

Ms. Suze Morrison: Today, I'd like to extend my best wishes to all of those celebrating the holy month of Ramadan in my riding of Toronto Centre. Ramadan is a

time to reflect and worship, to connect with loved ones and to extend generosity and kindness to those in need.

This is now the second Ramadan since the pandemic has started. This year, it may feel especially difficult once again, as communities will not be able to come together and celebrate in person at iftars, at prayers and at community events.

It has been inspiring, though, to see that the local mosques and the Muslim community organizations in my riding have still found ways to celebrate and give back even under these difficult circumstances. I want to thank our local Muslim community for your dedication and your compassion for those in need during Ramadan and all year long. Your support is especially appreciated this year, as so many people in our community are experiencing so much hardship and so much loss.

Speaker, I'd like to recognize Muslim Welfare Canada for their incredible work, providing Regent Park lunch service to folks experiencing isolation and food insecurity. I also want to recognize the Regent Park Islamic Resource Centre for their advocacy and commitment to collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Lastly, I'd like to thank all of the mosques in my riding, in Toronto Centre, for being, really, a cornerstone in our community when people are feeling so isolated and so alone.

I sincerely hope that we can all come together next year. To everyone in my community, I hope you have a peaceful and fulfilling Ramadan. Ramadan Mubarak.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's an honour to rise today and inform everyone in the Legislature and in Lambton county that there continue to be significant shipments of vaccine arriving on a weekly basis in Lambton county. I encourage everyone who is eligible to get their shot when their turn comes.

This week, Lambton Public Health will receive an additional 7,500 doses of vaccine to use at their mass vaccination clinics and pop-up clinics around the county. On average, over 1,000 people per day will be able to receive a vaccine through Lambton Public Health, thanks to their dedicated staff and efficient vaccine clinics.

Moreover, on Sunday, I was able to announce that two additional pharmacies in Lambton county will begin registering eligible individuals and administering vaccines this week. That brings the total number of pharmacies in our community with the vaccine to five. Thousands of vaccines have been made available through the pharmacies to date. They are delivered through a different supply chain and are not counted in Lambton Public Health's impressive vaccinations number.

When it comes to vaccines, the situation in Lambton county really is a positive and hopeful one. Lambton Public Health alone has administered over 30,000 doses of the vaccine to date, accounting for over 30% of the eligible individuals in Lambton county. Real progress is being made, Speaker. The way out of this pandemic is vaccines. As a province, we are leading the country at getting them in arms.

I encourage everyone in Lambton county and across this province to stay tuned for more good news on vaccine supply, and as I said earlier, when your turn comes, get your shot.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: Almost three years ago, I rose in this House for my inaugural address and spoke about Canadian kindness. I believed then and I believe now that Canada is the best country in the world. And why? Because of Canadians: so kind, so gracious, so charitable—people from coast to coast loving, respecting and caring for each other, because kindness is Canadian.

But, Speaker, I'm so fearful of this COVID dogma. COVID is a risky infection to some folks, and we need to protect them, but this radical obsession with COVID protocols that make ordinary people mistreat other people is putting Canadian kindness in jeopardy.

I was born and lived in the Soviet Union for the first nine years of my life. In autocratic regimes, people don't show kindness to each other. Thugs bully people into compliance on the street. Teachers tell on children. Neighbours snitch on neighbours. Non-conformity to state edicts results in exclusion, hate and prejudice. It's unthinkable, it's evil and it's most certainly un-Canadian.

So I plead with all the members of this House and anyone watching: Please stop the COVID bullying. Please try to love thy neighbour again. Please remember Canadian compassion, tolerance and accommodation. Please don't be mean to people in stores or on transit. Please recall what makes us Canadian and bring back the foundation for everything that's so wonderful about our country. Please try to be nice and compassionate with each other. Please bring back Canadian kindness.

1030

BANK ACT OF 1871

Mrs. Robin Martin: Today I rise to mark the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of the Bank Act of 1871. The act laid the groundwork for Canada to have a safe, sound, stable banking system, one that is highly regarded by global financial institutions and bodies like the IMF and the World Bank.

According to Joseph E. Martin, a business historian who is also my husband's father, the Bank Act was one of or, arguably, the greatest single accomplishment of our first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald—other than Confederation itself, of course. Had an earlier proposed Bank Act passed, from 1869, it would have given the Bank of Montreal the status of the Bank of England in the UK, thereby reducing Ontario banks to local county banks without branches, but, at around that time, two banks in Ontario had folded and Ontario MPs were concerned about future banking stability.

The 1871 Bank Act created a national branch banking system based on the ideas of Alexander Hamilton, founding father and first secretary of the US Treasury.

Macdonald had studied Hamilton's ideas and saw the wisdom of a strong central government and a national banking system.

I believe there are many important things we can learn from studying our history. Although Sir John A. Macdonald was undoubtedly a man of his times, we should celebrate not just his role in founding this country, but also his role in founding our sound financial system through the passage of the 1871 Bank Act which is so important to our strong and vital economy, which we will surely need post-COVID-19.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is for the Premier. Last week, the Premier announced a plan to vaccinate people who are aged 18-plus in hot-spot neighbourhoods. In fact, he said, "We have mobile units as we speak going out there right now to get people vaccinated."

Why did the Premier tell thousands of Ontarians that they could get vaccinated right now when he knew that there was no plan at all to do so?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: In fact, there is a plan to vaccinate people over 18 in hot-spot areas. They can't be booked through the online booking tool, but they can be booked through the public health units and they can be booked through some of the units that are starting up. For example, there is one in a hot-spot area at BAPS Charities on Highway 427. Using their own booking tool, yesterday, within the first hour, they booked 4,500 appointments with people of all ages.

So, yes, in fact, people 18 years of age and older can be done in a number of these clinics, a number of these pop-up units and a number of the mobile testing areas.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Premier: Health units had no idea that this was coming. They were put in a scramble, with no extra resources and no vaccines. In fact, Maureen Adamson, the chair of Scarborough Health Network board said, "Scarborough continues to struggle with the incomprehensible disparity in vaccine distribution for Canada's most diverse community and one of Ontario's most severe hot spots"—in some areas, a 24% positivity rate.

Why did the Premier tell Ontarians aged 18 years and up that they could actually get vaccines when they really had no plan, and, in fact, folks couldn't get the vaccines as the Premier promised?

Hon. Christine Elliott: There is a plan to make sure that every Ontarian who wants to receive a vaccine can get one. The public health units are very well aware of the plan. They are implementing it in their own ways, because

there are different ways. They're used to their own circumstances, they know their own geography, they know where people are and they know whether mass vaccination clinics are going to work best or whether it should be done in pharmacies or whether it should be done through the other units that are available to them.

What I can say with respect to Scarborough is, the problem there right now is lack of vaccines. We have had problems with all of the vaccines in the most recent times, including three delays in the arrival of the Moderna vaccine, which is scheduled to arrive today, but we have to wait to see if it actually arrives.

We have been moving the vaccines around to make sure that places can stay open, but in the case of Scarborough, it's the lack of supply. I know the federal government is doing whatever they can to get the supplies to us, but we are reliant on the federal government to send them to us. If we don't have the vaccines, we have to close the clinics temporarily, but it is only temporary until we get the vaccines. That's what—

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

Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday, the Premier actually mocked Ontarians by saying it was “very simple” to get a vaccination booked. The reaction from one hot-spot recipient is this, Speaker: “If [Doug Ford] wants people 18-49 to stop complaining that booking a vaccine”—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to interrupt the member and remind her that she has to refer to the Premier by the title of “the Premier.”

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'll reread the quote with the removal of the Premier's actual name: “If” the Premier “wants people 18-49 to stop complaining that booking a vaccine is confusing, he could stop lying about the availability of appointments and”—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And conclude.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my question is this: When is this government, when is this Premier, going to stop insulting Ontarians, when is he going to stop blaming Ontarians for his failure and actually do the work necessary to protect them from this third wave of COVID-19?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the leader of the official opposition, through you, Mr. Speaker, that that is absolutely not the case. The Premier has been taking every step possible to preserve the health and safety of every single Ontarian. That has been our goal throughout. That is behind every step that we've been taking.

We want to make sure that everyone who wants to receive a vaccine can get one. That's why we're offering them in so many locations: in the mass vaccination clinics, in pharmacies, in primary care facilities, in specialty clinics, pop-up clinics, mobile clinics. There's a variety of ways that people can access them—everyone, from those who are 18 years of age and up in hot spots, and people

who are at the appropriate ages for appropriate vaccines that are currently available.

That's what the Premier is working on. That's what I'm working on. That's what we're working on, on this side. Please join us and help out instead of complaining.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. There really is no effective plan to vaccinate essential workers who don't have the choice to stay home and keep themselves safe. In fact, yesterday this government actually passed the buck to employers, asking them to organize, pay for and operate clinics in workplaces.

Speaker, what happens to those workers whose employers can't or won't pay for and operate an on-site clinic? Are they just out of luck?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: There is a plan to deal with that. Let me use the example of the BAPS Charities in Etobicoke that are opening a clinic to be able to vaccinate people 18 years of age or older. One of the requirements for opening one of these clinics is to be able to vaccinate not just your workers or, in this case, your congregants, but to be able to supply vaccines to people in surrounding areas. As it happens, this is a temple that is in an industrial area in Etobicoke, and they are inviting workers from all of the surrounding areas to come in on their lunch hours, whenever they're able to do so. They've already booked over 4,500 applicants in the first hour of operation. I have no doubt they're going to be very successful. They estimate that they will be able to vaccinate over 30,000 people within about a two-week period.

That is significant, Speaker. That is reaching people in those areas.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I think everybody realizes that essential front-line workers who are going to work each and every day are, right now, the most vulnerable to this virus, to the variants of concern in the third wave. They can't afford to spend hours and hours and hours trying to find the needle in a haystack that is their booking. They don't have time and they can't afford—they can't afford—to stand in line for hours and hours waiting for their appointment at a pop-up clinic.

1040

So my question is, to this Premier, why is he refusing to provide workers in this province, those front-line heroes, with paid time off to get their vaccination? It is a barrier and it will be removed if the Premier does the right thing here. Why won't he?

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

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I'm proud to say that across this province employers and workers are working together every single day to ensure that as many people can get vaccinated as quickly as possible.

But let me remind the member opposite that we were the first jurisdiction in the country to pass job-protected leave. If any worker is in self-isolation, in quarantine, if you're a mom or a dad who has to stay home and look after a son or a daughter because of the disruptions in the school system, you can't be fired for that.

Furthermore, we've eliminated the need for sick notes during COVID-19. But I'm also extremely proud to say that we were the first jurisdiction to pass job-protected leave so any worker can go and get his or her vaccination. We'll continue to stand with every worker of this province so we get through COVID-19.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It really is frightening how out of touch this government is, that they don't understand what vulnerable workers face in terms of an ability to pay the bills and how much they rely on every single hour of wage that they toil for every single day. They just don't get it.

So we have a Premier that walked us right into this third wave with his eyes wide open. He then had no plan to vaccinate these front-line essential workers. He refuses to give them paid time off to get their vaccine and, certainly, paid sick days are not on the agenda.

My question is, when is this Premier going to stop insulting Ontarians, when is he going to stop pretending that he had a plan in place to get them vaccinated, and when will he do the work necessary to protect those front-line essential workers who are the most vulnerable in our province?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the members to take their seats.

The Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: There is a plan in place and it is working, because we have already provided over 3.4 million vaccines to people who somehow have been able to find their way through the system and to create appointments. We already have 2.4 million appointments booked to receive doses, of which 59,548 were booked yesterday. Yesterday, we also set a record for the number of daily vaccines administered: 112,647.

So, clearly, something is working. People are finding their way. They are going to the pharmacies. We've doubled the number of pharmacies. We have the mass vaccination clinics. Many people are now going to primary care providers because they feel more comfortable, if they have pre-existing conditions, to be able to do that. There is a way for people to make sure that they can get their vaccination. They don't have to wait in line for hours. They don't have to wait hours on the phone. It's quick, it's easy to do, and we recommend—

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

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The question is to the Premier. There are more and more disturbing questions about how

this government has selected its vaccine hot-spot regions and why some of those regions that are represented by government members have been labelled hot-spot regions despite the government's own data and its own evidence to the contrary.

No one should be playing politics with getting Ontarians vaccines, and I truly hope this is not a case of the government playing politics, because if it were just simply a massive oversight, they could make it right today. They could change the areas in which they distribute and identify vaccine hot spots. That's why we've written to the Auditor General to look into this, because the data does not lie.

Will the Premier come clean and tell us why his government has placed some of the worst-hit areas of COVID in our province so far down on the vaccination list?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Response? Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Unbelievable. Unbelievable that you should make any sort of suggestion, when we're dealing with the life and death of people across this province, that there was some political interference. In fact, if anything is the case, it's exactly the opposite.

So let me tell you—

Interjection: What about Kanata?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I'll tell you about Kanata, if you want to know about Kanata. Based on Public Health Ontario analysis, K2V in Kanata was identified as being in the top three deciles, top fifth, for COVID-19 based on COVID-19 hospitalization and mortality through mid-January 2021. The postal code was also high in factors associated with greater vulnerability and negative impacts of COVID-19, specifically sociodemographic barriers, which resulted in it being prioritized as a hot-spot community. I'll have more to say in my supplementary, Speaker.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: What is unbelievable is that there are people in Windsor and in Hamilton right now who are in desperate need of a vaccine, and no one can explain why they were left out. It is clear Ontarians need transparency about how these decisions were made, not more backroom muddling with urgent public health matters directly in front of us.

Speaker, my question to the Premier again: Will this government fully co-operate with any review the Auditor General may determine is necessary, and do one better and reveal exactly why this hot-spot vaccine distribution system has rolled out so poorly?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Clearly there is a need for more education on this issue on the other side of this House to understand exactly what has happened. I've just explained about the K2V designation—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You're driving the bus. You're driving us right over a cliff.

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

Hon. Christine Elliott:—but I can also advise you that the hot spots were informed by the science advisory table

using Public Health Ontario data. Their advice was accepted by the vaccine task force, which is comprised of many people who are outside of government. These are people who are specifically knowledgeable on this issue who accepted the advice of the science advisory table and then directed both the Solicitor General's office and the Ministry of Health to implement that plan. That's how it was decided, and that's what we are relying upon. It's the advice of the health science advisory table and the medical experts here.

As we receive more vaccines and more hot spots are identified by the science advisory table and the medical experts, we will be able to expand, but, right now, we're short on supply. We need to receive more—

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

The next question: the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: My question—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition, come to order. The Minister of Health, come to order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Give us the truth.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: Playing politics with people's minds.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook, come to order. If this continues, I'll start warning.

The next question.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Norman Miller: My question is for the Minister of Health. Just over two weeks ago, the minister stood in this House and told the House that we've reached a milestone in administering over two million vaccines. Less than three weeks later, and our province has surpassed another milestone by administering over 3.3 million doses to Ontarians across the province.

I know that the minister and everyone in government continues to work day and night to ensure more and more Ontarians can receive these life-saving vaccines. Would the minister please tell the members of this House how our government plans to ensure vaccines are going to those most at risk in hot spots across the province?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka for the question and for the great work that you're doing with your constituents.

Since day one, Speaker, our government has been committed to vaccinating Ontarians as quickly and safely as possible. We also know that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted certain neighbourhoods and communities across the province, and we understand that administering vaccines to people who live in these areas is critical to reducing the impact of COVID-19 as quickly as possible. That is why, as part of the second phase of our vaccine rollout, we have identified 114 highly impacted

neighbourhoods by postal code, which will be reached through mass immunization clinics, mobile teams and pop-up clinics.

Through a collaborative effort with our vaccination partners, we will be administering vaccines in high-risk congregate settings, residential buildings, faith-based locations and locations occupied by large employers in hot-spot neighbourhoods. Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to protect the most vulnerable in at-risk communities across our province.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you, Minister, and thank you to all those on the front lines for helping us administer vaccines.

Mr. Speaker, it's reassuring to hear the minister talk about our plan to ensure these areas that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 are going to be receiving the vaccines they need. I'm confident Ontarians can rest assured that we are well on our way to getting a vaccine into the arm of anyone who wants one.

1050

I know a number of factors were considered when determining what postal codes would be included within the 14 public health units that have hot-spot neighbourhoods. Would the minister please tell this House how these hot-spot neighbourhoods were determined?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you to the member. I would be happy to.

Let me be clear: Hot spots have been identified based on historic and ongoing rates of COVID-19 deaths, hospitalizations and transmissions. These communities were identified based not only on high rates of COVID-19, but also on outbreak data, research and analysis conducted by Ontario's COVID-19 science advisory table, low testing rates and sociodemographic barriers that may result in vaccine hesitancy.

Also, many of these areas, particularly in Toronto, have a high proportion of the population living in congregate settings, such as long-term-care homes, condominium buildings, supportive housing and homeless shelters and, as a result, are at higher risk of transmission and outbreaks.

Mr. Speaker, we are determined to have the most effective and equitable vaccine campaign in the country.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, at around 10:30 p.m. last night, Scarborough Health Network had to make the heart-breaking decision to contact residents across Scarborough to cancel approximately 10,000 vaccine appointments between today and Monday due to vaccine shortages.

Interjection.

Ms. Doly Begum: Mr. Speaker, I would really like to get my question across, because 10,000 people just found out they're not getting their vaccines. I want the Minister of Education to listen and I want all of the government members to listen. I am outraged; it's outrageous what you guys are doing.

I have stood in this House for months now, months and months, addressing the issue of vaccination for Scarborough like a broken record—I honestly feel like a broken record—and, frankly, begging for an equitable distribution of vaccines, not just for Scarborough Southwest but for all of Scarborough, only to get baseless, empty promises

The cumulative result of all the failures is what we're seeing right now, with Scarborough Health Network having to close two of their biggest vaccine operations at Centenary Hospital and at Centennial College, because this government failed to provide our community with the minimum amount of vaccines necessary.

Mr. Speaker, where are the 1.2 million unused vaccination dosages, and when will the government take our communities' pleas seriously?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask the members to please take their seats.

To respond? The Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I certainly have been listening to the requests that you have been providing and I have continued to reassure you that the vaccine doses are allocated based on population and based on risk. Based on population, they've been developed equitably across the province. Based on risk, as the member will know, you have a number of hot-spot neighbourhoods in Scarborough and extra doses have been allocated.

However, the issue here is one of supply. That is something that is beyond our control. That is in the control of the federal government.

While we know the federal government is making every effort they can right now to get supplies to us, as the member will know, a number of those vaccine shipments have been either reduced significantly or missed in the last several months. While we now have an ample supply of Pfizer coming in, that wasn't the case during the middle of February. We also know that we received a shipment of Moderna the week of March 22; it was only 30% of what was originally expected and what we were told by the federal government that we would receive.

The remaining 70% of our allocation, 225,600 doses, was further delayed and delivered to Ontario over the Easter weekend—

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

The supplementary question?

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, if the government was actually doing an equitable distribution, then why is it that according to the ICES data, the province has vaccinated fewer people in hot spots than in non-hot spots?

If you are receiving a small amount—and I'm not taking away blame from the federal government. I understand; I understand that both governments have responsibility. But if the federal government was giving us short amounts, you should have prioritized hot spots like Scarborough. Why aren't you giving us more vaccines?

Last week, the government announced the launch of mobile clinics without giving any notice to public health units, community health clinics, health networks across Scarborough, across the province, or any information about rollouts, registration or any details. Time and time

again, this government expects local health networks to clean up their mess.

Scarborough has upwards of a 24% positivity rate. They're transferring patients to hospitals across the province and our ICUs are full. This week, a couple in their forties was transferred to another ICU while their five-year-old child needed to be admitted because there was no one else to look after them—

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

The Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Every person in Ontario is important, wherever they live. Scarborough is of course included in that.

However, to suggest that the public health units did not know about the pop-up units and the other methods of receiving the vaccines, that they were unaware of that, is simply not the case. We have conversations three times a week with the directors of public hospitals and with the public health units, medical officers of health. They are very well aware of what is in the plan and what they're going to be doing in their own area. In fact, in some areas, they have identified their own hot spots, which they're entitled to do, because they can use their own allocation in the way that they see fit.

Also, any suggestion that we are not giving them the information about when we're receiving the full amounts is not the case. Often, we don't know ourselves until the day that we're supposed to be receiving them. Then, we're told that we're not going to receive them.

Under the circumstances, we are rolling out the vaccines well. We've got over 3.4 million doses in people's arms. With the latter part of your question about people having to be transferred, that is to preserve the capacity in our intensive care units to make sure that any Ontarian who needs to be admitted to hospital, into intensive care—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: My question is to the Premier. We know that every person in the province is important. The science table has told us, however, that not every person shares the same risk of this virus. The science table has told us that by postal code, we need to manage the distribution of vaccines, because some people are at more risk.

The people of Scarborough have been at the front line of this pandemic for over a year in terms of positivity rates, hospitalization and death, and we must act. We must act. The fact that your government—the Premier announces that people in hot spots over 18 can go and get a vaccine one week, and then today, two leading clinics in Scarborough which have been smoothly administering vaccines to people over 50 have been forced to close and to cancel 10,000 appointments.

My question to this government: Why is the Premier announcing expanded programs with no planning behind them? And why are you leaving the people—

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

To reply? Again, the Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can assure the member opposite that no one is being left behind. No one in Scarborough is being left behind; no one in any other part of Ontario is being left behind.

The issue is one of supply. The supply is not coming in on the dates that we expect to receive them. It is through the federal government that that happens.

We know they're working very hard on this. We know they are, but the reality is that sometimes, we don't receive the supply we need. That is why, in this particular case, this community clinic is required to close for a very short period of time. We did receive the Pfizer vaccine several days ago, but it is now being distributed across the units; this will be a very short-term issue. But the supply is being allocated equitably to all of those areas, including the number of hot-spot areas that exist in Scarborough.

We have been working with community partners since the very beginning, working with community health centres, working with groups that have social activities under regular circumstances. We want to make sure that people can go to places where they feel comfortable, where vaccine hesitancy can be dealt with, and that we can get as many needles into as many arms as possible, as quickly as possible.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Back to the minister: I believe that the people of this province are concerned about the decisions that your government is making. As I said, one week, you're opening up mobile clinics to people over 18 in hot spots; the next minute, the clinics vaccinating those most at risk over 50 have been forced to close. One minute, you're telling schools that they can continue to do in-person learning; the next day, you're shutting them down. It's confusing for people, and it shows an incompetence of this government.

1100

We give you ideas. I have asked this government to make paid vaccine leave for people who are essential workers, like the people in Scarborough, a part of the plan so that they can safely get their vaccine, and there has been no action. There has been no action on the advice that's going to save lives. When are you going to start planning proactively, so that the people of Scarborough aren't put at further risk?

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

Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been planning since the beginning of this pandemic. We have planned to expand capacity. We have created over 3,100 more beds and increased our intensive care capacity by 14%. We've also built up a testing system, so that we can now test over 60,000 people a day, which we are doing on a regular basis. We have already administered 3.4 million vaccines,

with more to come, in a variety of units. We've just doubled the number of pharmacies across Ontario where people can receive the vaccine. There is a plan.

But, as the member will know, COVID is moving very quickly, especially with these variants, and so we have to respond to that, and we are responding to that. We have regular modelling that comes to us from the science advisory table that helps us with the decisions that we need to make going forward.

We are listening to the concerns that have been expressed by other members. In fact, several members suggested that we have pop-up clinics that move into apartment buildings with frail, elderly seniors and others. We are doing that. We are going to where people are, to make sure that we can reach everyone who wants to receive a vaccine.

SHELTER SERVICES

Mr. Norman Miller: My question is for the Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues. The measures taken to protect Ontarians from the virus have confined families to their homes for extended periods of time. The risk of domestic violence is something many girls and women live with every day.

Even in normal circumstances, it can be difficult for people to know what resources are available to them and to reach out for support. This is even more difficult with less interactions with colleagues, friends and family members. Every person deserves to be safe in their home and feel safe no matter where they go, and if they do not feel safe, they need to know where they can go for help.

Can the minister please explain how the government is providing shelters the resources they require to help those in need?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, my hard-working neighbour to the north. Speaker, our Minister of Finance said in his budget that in order to have a healthy economy, we need healthy people, and I couldn't agree more. I would add that we cannot have healthy people or a healthy economy without keeping them safe.

Our government and our Premier take the issue of domestic violence very seriously, and we have zero tolerance for anyone who commits these acts. Violence against women is a threat and burden, and its removal should be a priority for every Ontarian and every person in this House.

Speaker, I am proud to say that our government has been making investments since the very beginning of the pandemic to support our heroes on the front lines who are helping those fleeing violence in such turbulent times. Shelters have remained open throughout the pandemic. We have provided \$70 million in funding to ensure proper infection prevention and control in residential settings to keep everyone safe, and we also have a public campaign to inform those who are fleeing violence that they are not alone and have a place to go.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the minister for that response. I'm happy to hear that shelters have continued to be a constant in our communities across Ontario during these difficult times, and that our government is prioritizing the safety and well-being of those fleeing domestic violence.

With more women accessing services, I want to know how our government is adequately supporting the shelter system. In order to provide women and children the support they require, we must make sure the tools are available, both in urban areas and rural and remote areas like my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Shelter staff are front-line heroes serving vulnerable members of our communities during the pandemic. To keep shelter staff and residents protected from COVID-19, shelters have had additional expenses in order to provide adequate supports. Can the minister please share what additional supports there are for women fleeing violence, and what others can do if they think someone is in danger?

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you again to the member for that question. Speaker, our government is taking action to make sure those who are not safe at home have somewhere safe to go. We recognize the increased demands on shelters throughout the pandemic. That is why, through the work of our Attorney General, Doug Downey, we provided an emergency payment of \$2.7 million last year to help ensure that over 50 community agencies remain accessible for women and children who are fleeing violence.

We also invested \$3.6 million specifically for rural and remote supports so women can get the help they need right in their communities. That allows women access to support without having to drive or fly long distances to get the help they need.

Speaker, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our incredible shelter workers for their tireless efforts to support women and children in our province. These workers have shown resiliency by adapting their work as safety measures continue to change. These workers have shown true Ontario spirit this past year and their work does not go unnoticed.

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITÉ LAURENTIENNE

Mr. Jamie West: My question is to the Premier. The Minister of Colleges and Universities said he knew about Laurentian's financial problems for more than six months before the CCAA process began. However, because the minister stood by and did nothing to protect Laurentian University from massive cuts, on Monday more than 70 French and English programs at the Laurentian campus were cut and over 100 employees lost their jobs.

Speaker, this minister has failed. He did nothing to protect francophone and Indigenous students at Université de Sudbury. He did nothing to protect nursing, psychology and social work students from Huntington University. He did nothing to protect arts, theatre and women's studies

students from Thorneloe University. He did nothing to protect Laurentian.

If he's not willing to do anything, then he shouldn't be the minister, full stop. My question, through you, Speaker: Will the Premier do the right thing and remove him?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the member for Northumberland–Peterborough South and the parliamentary assistant.

Mr. David Piccini: I thank the member for that question. We understand the very personal and difficult situation that many students, faculty and staff are in right now. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, that the courses of 90% of students at Laurentian have not been affected. For the 10% who have, we are ensuring that they have a pathway to graduation.

Mr. Speaker, with 45 publicly assisted post-secondary institutions in Ontario, we know that COVID has placed unique challenges on all of them. That's why the minister and I have had a number of consultation sessions with all of them over the course of the last year and a half. We've made investments of over \$126 million for additional financial supports to support with COVID challenges, \$466 million to address critical capital upgrades and repairs, and doubled mental health funding to support students.

What is the one thing in common on all those measures? That that member voted against every single one of them.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question? The member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est aussi pour le premier ministre.

Lors des dernières semaines, le ministre des Collèges et Universités a indiqué que la situation de la Laurentienne n'affecterait pas les étudiants. Le 10 mars, par exemple, le ministre a dit que les « étudiants ne seront pas touchés par ce qui se passe à l'Université Laurentienne ». Et tout récemment, il a dit qu'il travaillait pour que « les étudiants ... poursuivent leurs études sans interruption ». Évidemment, il n'a pas été capable de passer de la parole aux actes.

On parle des jeunes comme M^{me} Bourdages-Larose, de Hearst, qui étudie dans le programme de sage-femme, l'un des 69 programmes coupés et le seul programme de ce type offert en français au Canada. Le ministre va-t-il dire à M^{me} Bourdages-Larose que sa carrière ne vaut plus qu'une poignée d'argent pour les créanciers, et va-t-il quitter ses fonctions?

Mr. David Piccini: Again, merci pour la question.

Let me be clear. The courses of 90% of students have not been affected, and for the 10% of those who have been affected, we will ensure them a pathway to graduation.

But, Mr. Speaker, let me talk about the financial situation that that member and the other member mentioned that was recently brought to our government's attention. Those members wrote, identifying \$15 million needed in supports. Widely shared media reports have shown over \$300 million in liability concerns with that university. Something of this magnitude requires thorough and independent analysis. That's why we appointed Dr. Alan Harrison to address this. We respect the independent

legal proceedings. We respect the independent analysis so deeply needed in this situation.

When the minister said we'll explore greater financial transparency among universities, I hope that those two members and this party across will support us in those measures.

1110

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mme Lucille Collard: My question is for the Minister of Education. Mr. Speaker, the need for investment in education has never been so obvious as during the pandemic. Instead, the government has decided to cut nearly \$790 million from education. Sure, the announcement today for school infrastructure is good news, but it doesn't reverse the damage done to our schools, and funding is still deficient.

Teachers are already being laid off for the next school year, including French teachers that are urgently needed to address the ever-present shortage. This means that class sizes are going to be larger, resources will be further spread thin and students' needs and safety will be further compromised. Thanks to the federal government for stepping up, but education is the responsibility of the province, and this government isn't pulling its weight.

Why is the minister abandoning our education workers and families by cutting education funding for the next school year?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I'm very proud that today, with the federal government, Minister Scott and I announced the over \$500-million net new investment, a one-time investment to improve our schools, the facilities that our kids depend on to learn. We appreciate that these investments today will help us improve the safety of these facilities as we work to get students back—\$525 million for 3,200 net new projects. This is a one-time expenditure; it will help. That's in addition to the half a billion dollars we invest every single year to build new schools, in addition to the \$1.3 billion we invest every single year to maintain excellence within our school spaces.

Mr. Speaker, under our plan, because of our investments, because we followed the science, 7,000 more staff have been hired. We have one of the lowest case rates amongst youth under 20 in the nation. That is because we have invested, it's because we have listened to the medical officer of health. We will work every single day to improve the safety of schools and get kids back to class.

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

Mme Lucille Collard: Again to the Minister of Education: Just this week, the government announced that schools would once again close for an indeterminate amount of time. We have been hearing from education workers, students and parents for months on end that measures in schools have not been enough, that they feel unsafe in schools and that they are in dire need of more supports.

An \$8-billion investment in our education system would be a game-changer, but the government thinks that

Highway 413 is more important. They are willing to spend \$8 billion on an unwanted project that will destroy our environment, taking funding from our education system.

What does the minister have to say to the countless education workers and families who will feel the devastating impacts of the government's budget cuts, while his government builds an unwanted highway?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We are investing in public education, as we have done each and every year under our government—more funding than when the former Liberal government was in power at the peak of spending in the education portfolio, \$700 million more announced in the most recent budget.

But it's not just about that; it's about what we did during the pandemic—a \$1.6-billion plan, the most comprehensive protocols that followed the medical advice: We hired 7,000 more staff; 95% of our air ventilation systems within our schools have been improved; a \$224-million investment to build up our online learning and remote learning capacity, that infrastructure, to make sure that when we need it, like we do today, based exclusively on the rising transmission in the community that can create risk for our schools. It's now that these investments are best supporting children in the continuity of learning.

We are going to continue to be there for students, particularly as we look to September, with investments in the Grants for Student Needs, investments in school boards and safety, to ensure kids can have a good-quality education and that they remain safe in 2021 and beyond.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norman Miller: About a month ago, the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines made an exciting announcement about the future of the province's world-leading mineral exploration and development sector.

Ontario's Critical Minerals Strategy is the first of its kind in this province. It will help generate investment in the mining sector, increase the province's competitiveness in the global market and create jobs and opportunities for northern and Indigenous communities. Our government recognizes that the mineral sector needs to be a key driver of Ontario's economic recovery, given that it contributes over \$13.1 billion annually.

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has affected the entire minerals sector, but it is particularly challenging for junior exploration companies. What is the government doing through budget 2021, if passed, to support our mineral sector to ensure they can lead the way for Ontario's economic recovery?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Peterborough-Kawartha and parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Dave Smith: We know that the mineral exploration and mining sector is an important driver of economic growth in this province. Unfortunately, the impact of COVID-19 has exacerbated an existing challenge for junior companies: the challenge of raising capital for exploration.

Our government appreciates the mining sector, and we know that the junior companies rely on raising capital to finance their exploration. The success of these exploration companies is essential for a thriving sector. They're responsible for 50% of the discoveries that led to Ontario's new mines.

That's why, in the 2021 budget, we've outlined our plans to create the new Ontario Junior Exploration Program, or JEP. To support junior exploration companies, Ontario plans to invest \$5 million over the next two years in JEP. We know the junior miners are the rock at the base of our mineral sector, and we know that critical minerals are critical for our economic recovery.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you for that answer. I know just how important the mineral sector is and how many jobs this industry can create. Many of the jobs within the mining sector are skilled trades: skilled labourers, dump truck operators, crane operators, site foremen and supervisors, and the list goes on. These are jobs our government is looking to create and support, particularly as many workers in Ontario look to upskill and change their career paths post-COVID-19. We know how important it is for junior explorers to raise capital in order to make exciting new discoveries. The success of junior companies leads to millions of dollars in further investment, creates these skilled jobs and helps build strong communities in the north.

Would the member please tell us more about the Ontario Junior Exploration Program and how it would help junior companies if the budget is passed?

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you again for the question. Through the program, junior companies can apply for funding to cover eligible costs up to \$200,000. This program will attract investment as businesses leverage their funding to raise capital in the private markets.

Just listen to what Garry Clark, the executive director of the Ontario Prospectors Association, had to say: "On behalf of the OPA, I would like to thank the government for reigniting the Ontario Junior Exploration Program to support our members. This program is critical to help smaller exploration projects in Ontario raise money so they can find the mines of the future. It is great to see this government continue its strong record for supporting the mineral exploration and mining sector."

We're letting the people of Ontario know that Ontario is open for business and open for jobs, and that's exactly what this program does. The Ontario Junior Exploration Program will bring investment to Ontario's north, and I'm so excited to see the results of that.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: My question is to the Premier. The new COVID variants of concern are spreading like wildfire in London. Between March 28 and April 3, nearly 30% of COVID tests from the N6A postal code came back as positive, making it the highest in the province, and yet the Premier is dragging his feet, sitting on his wallet and has not declared N6A a hot spot.

On April 12, the members from London-Fanshawe, London West and I wrote to the Premier asking him to declare N6A a hot spot and to stop the spread by introducing mobile vaccination units and more funding for contact tracing and testing. We've heard no response from the Premier, despite the urgency of this issue. Will the Premier declare N6A a hot spot and commit to providing whatever resources are necessary to get these new variants under control?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member for the question. What we have done is identified 114 hot spots in different parts of the province based on the criteria that I've outlined earlier: historic data, areas of risk and so on. As we will be receiving more supply of the vaccines, we will be able to designate more hot spots, but we need to make sure, given the concerns that we've had with respect to the vaccines coming in on time, that we have sufficient quantities of the vaccines to be able to provide the vaccines in those areas.

We are doing whatever we can in order to make sure that we can maintain space in our hospitals, that we can do the testing that we need to do, including some of the rapid testing, to try and reduce the transmission of the variants of concern, which are—you're absolutely right—moving very quickly. They're more difficult to deal with. They're more hostile. They can result in more hospitalizations, more ICU beds being occupied and unfortunately more deaths. We are taking every step that we can to make sure that we have the capacity to deal with it both in terms of hospitals as well as vaccine supply.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Back to the Premier: Time is of the essence. Dithering and delaying will cost people their lives. Go to the science advisory table and designate London's N6A as a hot spot.

London Health Sciences Centre has been caring for patients from the GTA in addition to Londoners with COVID. Our ICU has the highest number of people in critical care on record, and now, our hospitals have had to cancel surgical procedures. Our health unit is now counting on Londoners to do their own contact tracing, because they're overwhelmed trying to track down cases with the new variants of concern. We need provincial support now. London is doing its part to help the province, and now the province needs to help London.

Will the Premier stop ignoring London, declare it a hot spot and provide our community with the resources it needs today?

Hon. Christine Elliott: No part of Ontario is being ignored, including London. We have already provided extra contact tracers to many parts of the province to allow them to follow up on the cases.

But you're absolutely right: The variants of concern are moving very quickly, and we need to be very nimble and move quickly to respond to them, which is what we are doing, which is why we declared this state of emergency and implemented the stay-at-home order, which is why we

are redeploying staff from other parts of the province to work in the hot spot areas, which is why we're also transferring patients from one part of the province to other hospitals, trying to keep them as close as possible to their home zone, recognizing it's hard for them to be away from their families, and making sure that we had to ramp down the hospitalizations and the surgical procedures and diagnostic procedures in order to provide space in our hospitals for COVID patients, still caring for those other patients as well.

We are moving quickly. We are responding to the need. We are responding to the increase in the variants, and we'll do whatever we can to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Mike Schreiner: My question is for the Premier. Small businesses across the province are going out of business. I participated in a town hall this morning with small businesses who are barely hanging on. They've closed their doors to keep us safe, but they need the government to have their back. Two rounds of funding through the Ontario Small Business Support Grant program is not enough now that we're in a third wave lockdown.

Speaker, will the Premier commit today to providing a third round of funding in the Ontario Small Business Support Grant so businesses that are barely hanging on can survive the third wave of the pandemic?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Flamborough–Glanbrook and parliamentary assistant.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning. Speaker, we understand, our government understands, that businesses have faced mounting pressure throughout this pandemic. That is why since day one we have worked with small businesses to develop and contribute to programs that will help them get through these very difficult times. As the member noted, the Ontario Small Business Support Grant provides businesses who were forced to close or who have significantly reduced their services under the province-wide shutdown a grant of up to \$20,000 in funding. To date, we have made \$1.4 billion in payments, with more than 100,000 businesses being approved for the grants. The extraordinary response to the program demonstrates just how important this assistance is to small businesses.

Our government announced that this grant will be doubled for all eligible businesses, meaning those who received a payment will automatically receive a second one. Ontarians can rest assured that our government has and will continue to be there to support small business.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Speaker, with all due respect, I don't think the Premier understands how desperate small businesses are. The government's mixed messaging and flip-flopping are creating confusion and chaos for small business owners and for people, whether it's students and educators confused because we say schools are open one

day and close them the next day or we say we're going to have vaccine clinics in certain neighbourhoods but then those vaccine clinics don't show up. Small businesses are confused when they're told one day they can open and then a few days later they're going to have to close. The restaurant association estimates that costs small businesses over \$100 million—just that one flip-flip alone from the Premier.

Speaker, if the government truly understands how tough it is for small businesses right now, they will commit to a third round of funding for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant today. Here's your chance to do the right thing.

Ms. Donna Skelly: To be very clear, our government will always, always stand and have the backs of small businesses across Ontario. Since last year, we have been partnering with the federal government to provide almost \$1 billion in urgent relief through Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance. As we mentioned, we are providing two rounds of payments, up to \$20,000 each in grants, for small businesses that are eligible, and the businesses can use that money how they see fit.

We've also been helping support our restaurant industry. Our government permanently allowed licensed restaurants and bars to include alcohol with food as part of takeout or delivery orders. This enables restaurants and bars to maintain the new revenue streams the government opened to them in the early days of the pandemic. It has been a lifeline of support to boost businesses at critical times, and it's helping them refine their business model beyond the pandemic, allowing them to carve out new product offerings to increase their competitive edge.

If they want to find more information on the government supports available, they can do so at our government website.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: My question is to the Premier. I could have literally chosen from dozens of examples of confusing eligibility or application errors that go nowhere with the Ontario Small Business Support Grant program. Businesses across Ontario are given form responses like, "We will get back to you soon," or just outright wrong information.

Businesses in St. Catharines, like Hewad Kabob and Shawarma, have been calling since January for an update. They were told to email in their concerns, then have heard nothing for weeks. Finally, they received a response that said they were declined because their business is not on the list of eligible businesses—except they are eligible as a restaurant. So they emailed back to clarify. They then again heard nothing—crickets.

Premier, will you fix this chaos experienced by too many businesses, take some time to respond to your emails and allow us to help small businesses within our communities so that they have the help so desperately needed?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Flamborough–Glanbrook, the parliamentary assistant.

Ms. Donna Skelly: We have listened to small businesses. I have personally worked with small businesses certainly across my riding but also across Hamilton Mountain and Hamilton Centre. I'm dealing with a business in Hamilton Centre. I've been told—direct all their queries to my office, and I would gladly help any small business in the city of Hamilton or across the province. I'm looking at the member opposite.

We're dealing with small businesses in northern Ontario, who have been very interested in our small business support grant program. We have already given businesses \$1.4 billion in payments. That's helping over 100,000 small businesses across Ontario.

I will continue, as will our government and our Premier, to work with all small businesses, helping them access this funding, helping them access the main street relief grant program and our PPE support program. Mr. Speaker, I will work with businesses in my riding and businesses in your riding if they're finding it difficult to access it, but the funding is there.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Back to the Premier: That was a parochial answer. You promised businesses money. Now, can you actually follow through? Pointing to how many signed up for the grant doesn't help the many businesses that are struggling with the loss of income today and waiting for answers. Details matter. Could you please just answer your emails?

Another local business in St. Catharines, SuperPlak, incorrectly entered in one number on their form—I said one number. They knew their mistake right away and they have been trying to get it fixed through the ministry. They have received nothing but silence. If the government cannot fix something as simple as an input error—since January, of course—then Ontario is in big, big trouble.

Premier, when will the minister be able to fix simple input errors and answer questions about timelines so that local businesses with local customers, like SuperPlak, can get through another lockdown and the third wave? Help them—

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

The member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

1130

Ms. Donna Skelly: All eligible applicants who applied by the deadline will receive a grant after their application has been reviewed and has been approved.

Our government understands that small businesses do need the support, which is why the Ontario Small Business Support Grant has made over \$1.4 billion in payments, and that's just so far. While they process a high volume of applicants, we understand the extreme sense of urgency many small businesses are feeling during this very difficult time. We're working to further accelerate the processing of applications to ensure that businesses get the support they need as quickly as possible and have taken many steps to speed up the process.

We have tripled the number of public servants that review applications and have increased the resources required to process them in a timely and responsible way.

As part of our 2021 budget, our government is providing an additional round of support to help eligible employers impacted by necessary public health restrictions. They will receive, automatically, a second payment in an amount—

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

The next question.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Minister of Education. Time after time, the minister insisted that schools are safe. That's right, not because of some ministry memo, but because kids are not generally harmed by COVID. Incredible studies reveal that kids transmit COVID far less than adults. The real harm to Ontario's children results from the closure of schools. It's not COVID; it's lockdown that's putting our children at risk.

The children's hospital in Hamilton said that the number of youth hospitalized after attempted suicide has tripled. Calls to Kids Help Phone in 2020 have more than doubled. Many kids are self-harming. They're anxious. SickKids is citing a pandemic of eating disorders.

Ontario's kids are in crisis. They're not in danger of COVID; they're in danger of this government, and the minister knows he's doing harm. So what happened, Minister? Was it the polling, was it the public pressure or was it the pressure from the teachers' unions that made you capitulate? Why are you harming Ontario's kids?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Quite obviously, it was the spike in community transmission in this province, which is why we took action.

We have always had to decisively act, sometimes pivoting quickly in a pandemic, in a crisis, as we did last March when we closed schools—the first province to do so. We did so with the full knowledge that that action would help save lives.

The fact is, Speaker, the Chief Medical Officer of Health has confirmed that schools have been safe. Every medical officer of health in the province has said the same. But in the words of SickKids, as the member opposite cited—the CEO of SickKids, Dr. Ronnie Cohn, said on Monday, "I don't think we can open schools right now. We have to just now do our part and not fail our children and do everything we can to drive down community transmission so that schools can be the first doors to open." We absolutely agree. I'm working with the Minister of Health and the Chief Medical Officer of Health to ensure schools can reopen, but it must be safe. We're going to work hard to do that, Mr. Speaker.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Sudbury has informed me that he has a point of order he wishes to raise.

Mr. Jamie West: I rise on a point of order to correct my record. Yesterday, during the morning's question period and again during the afternoon's notice of member's dissatisfaction, I misspoke about the Laurentian

midwifery program. I called it the profession de sage-femme. I recently connected with Lisa Morgan, the director of the school of midwifery. I learned I'd made an error. While it is factual the government is allowing this important program to close, I misspoke when I said it was the only bilingual midwifery program in Ontario: Laurentian's program is, in fact, the only bilingual midwifery program in Canada and the only francophone program outside of Quebec.

DEFERRED VOTES

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA DIVULGATION DE LA VIOLENCE ENTRE PARTENAIRES INTIMES

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 274, An Act respecting the disclosure of information related to intimate partner violence / Projet de loi 274, Loi concernant la divulgation de renseignements liés à la violence entre partenaires intimes.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bells will now ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to please prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1135 to 1205.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 274, An Act respecting the disclosure of information related to intimate partner violence, has been held.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 15; the nays are 34.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negated.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Scarborough Southwest has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Health concerning vaccines in Scarborough. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

This House stands in recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1206 to 1500.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I beg leave to present a report on Waterfront Toronto, section 3.15, 2018 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Natyshak presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I do. Thank you very much, Speaker. As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm pleased to table the committee's report today, entitled Waterfront Toronto, section 3.15, 2018 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the permanent members of the committee: France Gélinas as Vice-Chair; Deepak Anand; Toby Barrett; Jessica Bell; Stephen Blais; Stephen Crawford; Rudy Cuzzetto; Christine Hogarth; Daryl Kramp; and Michael Parsa. I'd also like to thank the previous members of the committee and substitutes who contributed during the public hearing and the drafting of this report.

The committee extends its appreciation to officials from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Waterfront Toronto. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing deliberations by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and staff in legislative research.

I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I beg leave to present a report on the Ontario Disability Support Program, section 3.09, 2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Natyshak presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations. Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm pleased to table the committee's report today, entitled Ontario Disability Support Program, section 3.09, 2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the permanent membership of the committee: Madame France Gélinas, Vice-Chair; Deepak Anand; Toby Barrett; Jessica Bell; Stephen Blais; Stephen Crawford; Rudy Cuzzetto; Christine Hogarth; Daryl Kramp; and Michael Parsa.

J'aimerais aussi remercier tous les membres qui ont contribué à ce comité et les substituts qui ont contribué durant nos discours.

The committee extends its appreciation to officials from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings from the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee and staff in legislative research.

I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you'll find unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting notice for private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent of the House to move a motion without notice with respect to private members' public business. Agreed? Agreed.

Once again, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I move that notice for ballot item number 73, standing in the name of Ms. Triantafilopoulos; ballot item number 77, standing in the name of Ms. Fee; ballot item number 79, standing in the name of Mr. Sabawy; and ballot item number 82, standing in the name of Mr. Mamakwa, be waived.

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

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Chris Mask, who is from Wahnapiatae in my riding, for these petitions.

"Ban Retirement Home" COVID "charges...

"Whereas Ontario's retirement homes are largely privately owned corporations; and

"Whereas these businesses have a responsibility to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to their employees; and

"Whereas many retirement homes are adding PPE charges to the residents' monthly bill, but the PPE is not for the residents but for the employees of the retirement home; and

"Whereas residents of some Sudbury retirement homes have effectively organized letter-writing campaigns and actions to have the PPE charges to residents cancelled and recognized as a retirement home's cost of doing business;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Treat our province's seniors with respect and ban any additional COVID-related fees, including PPE, to retirement home residents."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and sent it to the Clerk.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank Loretta Clipperton Carnes for collecting these petitions on behalf of the people in Sudbury. It is the Alliance Against the Ontario Autism Program.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the PC government of Ontario recently announced plans to overhaul the Ontario Autism Program, implementing a two-tiered age- and income-based funding model, and effectively removing funding for any significant duration of comprehensive applied behavioural analysis (ABA) from all children living with the autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas in 2003 and again in 2016, previous age caps on comprehensive therapy were removed by former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty and former Liberal Premier"—I can't remember her riding—"because the age cap was recognized to be unfair and discriminatory; and

"Whereas ABA is not a therapy, but a science, upon which interventions including comprehensive treatment is founded and duration and intensity of treatment are the key components in predicting outcomes—not age; and

"Whereas accredited peer-reviewed empirical evidence in the treatment of children with ASD has repeatedly shown that for some children with ASD, comprehensive ABA therapy is best practice and the only suitable intervention; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have increased in length as a result of the 66% increase in costs to administer direct service compared to direct funding, as reported by the Auditor General in 2013, and with the direct service model being eliminated with the Ontario Autism Program reforms, the PC government has a chance to build a needs-based system that will help every child reach their full potential; and

"Whereas it is unacceptable for the Premier of Ontario or his government to drastically reduce essential supports

for some of the province's most vulnerable children without consideration of their individualized needs;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government to immediately reassess the changes to the Ontario Autism Program and redesign the direct funding model to be administered with a needs-based approach in order to ensure that all children with ASD for whom continuous or comprehensive therapy has been prescribed by a qualified clinician are able to obtain these services in a timely manner regardless of their age or family income."

I agree with this petition, I'll affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

DOCUMENTS GOUVERNEMENTAUX

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank M^{me} Danielle Creamer, qui est de Rockland en Ontario.

« Pétition—Accents en français sur les cartes de santé de l'Ontario...

« Alors qu'il est important d'avoir le nom exact des personnes sur les cartes émises par le gouvernement, » telle « la carte santé...;

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

« Alors que ... le ministère de la Santé » a « confirmé que le système informatique de l'Ontario ne permet pas l'enregistrement des lettres avec des accents; »

Ils demandent à « l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario ... qu'elle s'assure que les accents de la langue française soient inclus sur tous les documents et cartes émis par le gouvernement de l'Ontario. »

J'appuie cette pétition, je vais la signer et je l'envoie à la table des greffiers.

1510

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Jamie West: Just a note because of parliamentary procedure: It uses the Premier's name, so I'll substitute "Premier" where appropriate. The petition says:

"Petition to Stop" the Premier "from Cutting Wages and Benefits.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas today all workers have two paid sick days and eight unpaid emergency leave days;

"Whereas today employers cannot require workers to get a doctor's note to take a sick day or a death certificate to take a bereavement day;

"Whereas today part-time and temporary workers must be paid the same as full-time employees when doing the exact same work;

"Whereas today there are a growing number of Ontarians working in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and precarious employment, with one in four Ontarians earning below \$15 an hour;

"Whereas the" Premier's "government's decision demonstrates a complete lack of respect for working people, while catering to big business and corporate interests by:

"—taking away two paid sick days;

"—requiring sick and bereavement notes from workers;

"— ending equal pay for equal work provisions;

"—cancelling a scheduled minimum wage increase;

"Whereas in a province as prosperous as Ontario, every family member deserves a fair wage and a decent living;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to abandon the" Premier's "government's backward proposals, and instead commit to a \$15-an-hour minimum wage that keeps up with inflation, access to paid sick leave and emergency days, equal pay for equal work, more job opportunities and more respect for the working people of Ontario."

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature and provide it to the Clerk.

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

M^{me} France Gélinas: This petition comes from youth from all over Ontario.

"—In the past 10 years in Ontario, 86% of all movies with on-screen smoking were rated for youth;

"—The tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use on screen;

"—A scientific report released by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit estimated that 185,000 children in Ontario today will be recruited to smoking by exposure to on-screen smoking;

"—More than 59,000 will eventually die from tobacco-related cancers, strokes, heart disease and emphysema, incurring at least \$1.1 billion in health care costs; and whereas an adult rating (18A) for movies that promote on-screen tobacco in Ontario would save at least 30,000 lives and half a billion health care dollars;

"—The Ontario government has a stated goal to achieve the lowest smoking rates in Canada;

"—79% of Ontarians support not allowing smoking in movies rated" for youth;

"—The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has the authority to amend the regulations of the Film Classification Act via cabinet;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"—To request the Standing Committee on Government Agencies examine the ways in which the regulations of the Film Classification Act could be amended to reduce smoking in youth-rated films released in Ontario;

"—That the committee report back on its findings to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and that the Minister of Government and Consumer Services prepare a response."

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank my colleague the member from Nickel Belt for creating this petition for the citizens of Sudbury to sign. It says:

“MS Specialized Clinic in Sudbury.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas northeastern Ontario has one of the highest rates of multiple sclerosis (MS) in Ontario; and

“Whereas specialized MS clinics provide essential health care services to those living with multiple sclerosis, their caregiver and their family; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is recognized as a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario;

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

“Immediately set up a specialized MS clinic in the Sudbury area that is staffed by a neurologist who specializes in the treatment of multiple sclerosis, a physiotherapist and a social worker at a minimum.”

I support this petition. I’ll sign it on behalf of my uncle who died from MS and provide it to the Clerk.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING ONTARIO ELECTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉLECTIONS EN ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 14, 2021, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 254, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to elections and members of the Assembly / *Projet de loi 254, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les élections et les députés à l’Assemblée.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. I feel like I’m far enough away from everyone that I’ll be allowed to take my mask off, but if I see anybody coming around, I’ll put it back on right away.

It is my pleasure to put a few words on the record about Bill 254, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021.

We all know that we are in the midst of the third wave of a pandemic. We come from all over the province to come here, at Queen’s Park, because it is so important that the government sit through this pandemic to try to help the people of Ontario. We are under an emergency order right now that gives the government the right to take away our rights, which they have done by issuing a stay-at-home order in line with the recommendations from public health, because the third wave is out of control. I would tell you, Speaker, that we could have done a whole lot more to prevent us from going into the third wave of the pandemic. But we didn’t, so here we are at Queen’s Park because the people of Ontario need us.

So what kind of bill are we debating this afternoon? We are debating a bill that has nothing to do with helping people; that has nothing to do with keeping our community healthy; nothing to do with the recommendations of public health experts. It has a whole lot to do with allowing people who have lots of money to give more money to

politicians. For the life of me, I cannot understand why this is a priority and why we are debating this bill.

I firmly believe that we live in a democracy; that anybody who wants to run for office should be able to do so. It doesn’t matter if you have money or not. It doesn’t matter if you are a white, privileged, rich old man. Anybody should be able to become an MPP. And apparently, to do this, you will need more and more money.

At the core of it, I oppose this. I oppose this. What do rich, mainly men of privilege know about what a 17-year-old single mom needs? I’m not too sure. I want every seat in this House to be available to every Ontarian, not just Ontarians who are able to tap into their friends and colleagues who can give them \$50,000 dollars to run for leadership. Who are we kidding here? Who are we kidding?

We presently have a donation limit of \$1,650. I have been an MPP for 14 years and I did not know what the donation limit was because in Nickel Belt, I don’t think—if I’ve had somebody give me \$1,650, I think I would have known. Nobody gives that kind of money in Nickel Belt. They give 20 bucks, \$25 if things go well. This is how, in the last 54 years, they have elected New Democrat representatives to Queen’s Park: by making sure that a whole bunch of people in Nickel Belt give 25 bucks, 20 bucks to the person who runs and we put together a campaign. Elie Martel won the seat for 20 years, Shelley Martel won the seat for 20 years and I’ve been here for 14, and I didn’t know that the donation limit was \$1,650. I certainly cannot see the day where I would need that limit to be \$3,300.

Who gives \$3,300? Who has that kind of money to give to a politician? I don’t know, Speaker. And I don’t know why, in the middle of a pandemic, this is such a priority that it has to be debated now. It has to be debated now, although our hospitals have a backlog of a quarter of a million surgical procedures that have been postponed because of the pandemic.

1520

We have ICUs in Toronto that are filled to the brim, that have to transfer sick people, not only out of their community hospitals but out of town. Can you imagine? Your husband or wife is on life support in ICU. You have this morning meeting when they tell you she has a 5%, 6%, maybe 7% chance of survival, and, “By the way, we are sending her to Kingston.” You live in Toronto. You haven’t got a car. This is your wife, she has a 6% chance of living, and they’re transferring her hundreds of kilometres away.

This is what’s happening right here, right now in Ontario, and I get to debate making donations go up to \$3,300. How did we end up there? I don’t know. I really don’t know.

This is not a priority for anybody. I cannot see who this is a priority for. I guess it’s a priority for the government, because they brought that bill forward, but, really? The government who has declared a state of emergency, the government who is taking rights and freedoms away from people, has as a priority making the donation limit go to

\$3,300. I can't wrap my head around this, Speaker. I just can't.

I can tell you—did the last election run great? Could there be things that we could do to improve our voting process? Absolutely. I'm going to read into the record a letter that I wrote to the Chief Electoral Officer after the 2018 election to give you a sense as to what it is that the people of Nickel Belt would like to see as changes in the Election Act. It goes as follows:

"During the recent provincial election campaign"—that was back in 2018—"many residents in the riding of Nickel Belt reached out to me to share problems they were having with their voter ID cards, polling locations as well as the registry and voting process.

"One of the most common complaints was the Elections Ontario decision to not provide polling locations in isolated communities that have always had polling locations in the past. In my riding these communities" had to travel distances—and I will give you the one-way travel distance—that were completely prohibitive to them taking part in the election process.

Here are a few examples of one-way travel in kilometres and in time: The good people of Biscotasing had to travel 105 kilometres, and it's through a bush road, part of it, so to get to the nearest polling station was a two-hour-and-14-minute ride. The good people of Shining Tree had 85 kilometres, which is on a better road, so it took them about an hour. The people of Westree had 76 kilometres, again, on a better road, about an hour's ride. Morin Village had 67 kilometres to the nearest polling station. That's over 45 minutes.

"I have attached"—I won't read them—"a sample of messages that I have received from residents who are clearly disappointed," because they did not vote, Speaker. Who would travel for two hours one way to go cast a ballot?

Those people always had polling stations in their communities before, but because of lack of funds, there were no more polling stations in Biscotasing, Shining Tree, Westree, Morin Village, and I could name a whole lot more—33, to be precise, other communities in Nickel Belt that did not have polling stations.

"Residents of Foleyet"—a beautiful little community in the northwest of my riding—"were in disbelief that Elections Ontario made the decision to deny an advance polling location in their community. Many people in Foleyet work for the railway" and they work one week on, one week off, so that means that for everybody who was on that week, there was no advance polling station; they were gone when the opportunity to vote was there, so half of the workers did not get to vote. They could have travelled 168 kilometres, close to two hours one way, to Gogama, to go to the closest advance poll. "Apparently, they did not receive a letter informing them of their options for special ballots or home visits until the week just before e-day." But that information was too late, because the shift that was gone for their week on was already gone.

"To compound the problem we estimated that well over half of the established residents did not receive voter ID

cards. They had to go through the registration process on election day. There were also reports of residents from Foleyet receiving voter ID cards"—and they saved them, to show them to me—"directing them to vote outside of the riding and in communities"—they were directed to vote in Nairn Centre, if anyone knows where Nairn Centre is, which is only 331 kilometres away from their home. Try to process that: 331 kilometres away from your home. Who is going to go vote again?

"It also came as a shock to residents in Azilda, population of 4,663 that they would not have access to an advance poll location in their community for the first time." How is 4,663 considered too small to have an advance polling station? But it was.

"Further, without apparent reason, one out of three residents did not receive voter ID cards throughout the riding. Most of the complaints I received were from residents who have had the same address for more than a decade. The explanations offered such as mix-ups due to postal codes and duplicate street addresses due to the amalgamated cities"—that happened 13 years ago—"do not explain why one member of the household received a card, but the rest did not." Some would receive a card directing them to another riding altogether. This has an impact on voter participation, since residents are not sure where to vote, or if their information had been dropped from the registry.

"Sadly too many of our residents had difficulty accessing information and had to make several inquiries in order to get directions on when and where to vote because a great number did not receive ID voter cards or were no longer on the voter registry. We received calls from residents who received their voter ID cards; however once they arrived at a polling location they were not on the voters registry. For these reasons, polling locations were overwhelmed in communities such as Foleyet, Garson and Lively in my riding with very long lineups out the doors of polling locations because of the long process of re-registering long-time residents" of those communities.

I happened to be voting in Lively. This is where my closest polling station was, and you could see, Speaker—when you see people lining up out the door, you keep right on going. First of all, the parking lots were full. Who wants to go park way out at the farm and then walk back to the polling station, just so that you could wait there for you did not know how long?

"I am very concerned that the citizens of my riding are losing faith in the province's ability to protect and support our democratic process. Some are questioning whether they are being denied fair access to vote.

"Please let me know what can be done to make voting easier for the residents of Nickel Belt in the next provincial election."

1530

So I looked through the bill to see: Are the good people of Nickel Belt going to be helped by this bill which is supposed to be there to improve the democratic process? It is supposed to be there to make it easier for people to vote.

I should open up this little parenthesis that 40,000 people in Nickel Belt do not have access to the Internet, so to think that sending information via the Internet and all of this is going to help us—forget it. I have access to the Internet where I live in Nickel Belt. It is really, really bad, and really, really slow, and really, really expensive. That's a lot of "really," but it's worth it. So if we think that any help will come through those technologies, it's not going to come for the people of Nickel Belt.

Monsieur le Président, j'étais extrêmement surprise de voir le contenu du projet de loi 254, un projet de loi qui, en toute apparence, est là pour faciliter le processus électoral, pour s'assurer que plus de gens vont participer au processus électoral. Mais ce qu'on voit vraiment dans ce projet de loi, c'est que les dons qui peuvent être faits aux gens qui se présentent aux élections vont passer de 1 650 \$ à 3 300 \$ par personne.

Moi, je suis politicienne depuis 14 ans. Je n'ai jamais rencontré personne qui serait intéressé à faire un don de 3 300 \$. Je n'ai aucune idée pourquoi ça c'est une priorité quand on fait face à une troisième vague de la COVID, qu'on est au milieu d'une pandémie, qu'on fait venir des députés des 124 circonscriptions de l'Ontario, qu'on les amène tous ici—parce qu'on ne pourrait pas faire ça de façon virtuelle, non, non, non. Il faut venir ici parce que c'est tellement important d'aider les gens pendant une pandémie. Et comment aide-t-on les gens pendant une pandémie, monsieur le Président? On leur dit qu'ils vont pouvoir faire des dons de 3 300 \$.

Je n'ai aucune idée d'où ça sort, ça, mais je peux vous garantir que ça ne vient pas des néo-démocrates, que ça ne vient pas des gens de l'Ontario. Les seuls qui ont peut-être un intérêt dans ce genre de chose-là, j'imagine qu'ils sont de l'autre côté du couloir, du côté des conservateurs, qui, eux, ont peut-être des amis qui ont 3 300 \$ à donner. Mais il n'y en a pas beaucoup, des amis comme ça.

Je peux vous dire que dans le Nickel Belt, on a quand même des campagnes à succès. On a eu M. Elie Martel pendant 20 ans. On a eu M^{me} Shelley Martel pendant 20 ans. Moi, je suis ici depuis 14 ans. Puis on n'a jamais fait de levées de fonds pour les campagnes qui demandaient aux gens de donner des milliers de dollars. Les campagnes, ça se fait avec des dons de 20 \$, des fois des dons de 25 \$. Je suis sûre qu'il y a eu quelques gros dons qui ont été faits à ma campagne; tout ça est en ligne. Mais ce n'est pas une priorité pour personne dans le Nickel Belt.

Les priorités, c'est vraiment de s'assurer que les communautés de Nickel Belt vont être capables d'aller voter à l'avance. Dans le projet de loi, on va pouvoir voter cinq jours avant ce qu'on votait avant. C'est merveilleux, mais si tu n'as pas une place pour aller voter à l'avance, ça ne t'avance pas bien bien. Puis, à un minimum, s'assurer que le jour du scrutin, toutes les communautés ont accès à une place pour aller voter. De demander aux gens de faire 200 kilomètres de voiture pour leur bulletin de vote, ce n'est pas quelque chose de raisonnable. C'est quelque chose qui aurait dû être dans ce projet de loi, mais qui ne l'est pas.

Je vous remercie, monsieur le Président.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you to the member for Nickel Belt for her presentation on Bill 254. Next, we have questions for the member for Nickel Belt, and we'll start with the member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt for that dissertation and explanation of Election Ontario's faults.

I had the distinct privilege to serve numerous times as a returning officer in the riding of Sarnia—Lambton, long before I ran for office. I would say that that was a big fault of that returning officer, that man or woman; I hope they're not there now. Because I know, when I was a returning officer, I had the ability to establish advance polls where I wanted and where I knew there was a need. It sounds like that returning officer, man or woman, whoever he or she was, wasn't doing their job. You didn't say if the chief returning officer replied to your letter. I'd like to know that sometime.

The one question I do have is on the doubling of the advance poll days. If the polls were in the right locations—which you said they weren't, and I certainly believe you—the doubling of days from five to 10: Would that make some difference, if the polls were in the proper spot?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I thank the member from Sarnia for his question. Yes, absolutely. If we were able to get advance polling stations in the different communities of Nickel Belt, the people would take advantage of it. And if those were the doubling of the number of days for early voting, it's something that the people of Nickel Belt will support.

As you know, Nickel Belt has a lot of mines. Nickel: Those are mines. A lot of people work shift in, shift out, so they will be out of the community for a week, sometimes 10 days, and then back in the community for their days off. So to be able to vote in advance would be something very useful to the people of Nickel Belt, and something that we support. But again, it has to be in their community. Travelling 200 kilometres to the nearest early voting poll is no use. Nobody is doing that.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Brampton North as well as to rise on this International Day of Pink, which is why I'm wearing pink today.

My question is to the member from Nickel Belt, with her amazing speech on this bill. It's been suggested that a weekend election, featuring a two-day polling period on a Saturday and a Sunday—there have been suggestions as such, because they understand this will help to enhance social distancing and safety in the context of COVID-19.

The government had a very good opportunity with this bill to address many Ontarians' ability to vote. As I've said about paid sick days, which is a big issue in my riding of Brampton North, many Ontarians don't have paid sick days, and they go to work sick because they have to choose between their paycheque or staying home and recovering. How many Ontarians are in the same boat and must choose between their paycheque or taking a day off to vote?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The question of paid sick days is the biggest public health step that we should have taken, that we must take and that must happen. If we want this pandemic to end, if we want to be able to go back to work, go back to school, go back to our businesses and our lives, the fastest way to do this is to make sure that workers who feel sick won't lose a paycheck to stay home. That means you don't have to choose between paying the rent and feeding your kids or going to work when you feel sick.

With over 4,000 people getting a positive COVID diagnostic every day in Ontario for the last week, paid sick days would change this. It has to be done.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for Nickel Belt for her speech. I think the member from Nickel Belt is a very effective member, and obviously especially effective on this issue because of her letter to the Chief Electoral Officer—I believe that's who the letter was to—because what she was asking for is actually what's being delivered in this bill, and that is more voting opportunities and more flexibility.

You were talking about the way it used to be and how shocked people were that there weren't voting stations. Well, that's what this bill is trying to accomplish with those five extra voting days—and flexibility built into it. I totally agree with you that someone shouldn't have to drive, I think you said 160 kilometres one way, to be able to vote. That's very applicable to my own riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka as well. So I'm pleased to see that you advocated for that. You were very successful in your advocacy, and that is one of the recommendations, among many, made by the Chief Electoral Officer.

1540

You also talked about democracy, and that anyone should be able to run. The nomination process is simplified in the bill, too. I know my nomination was pretty—not a lot of money was spent and it was pretty simple. That is also one of the things simplified, and of course the Integrity Commissioner has also made recommendations with regard to social media that I hope you will support as well. Thank you.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I thank the member for his comments.

The part that is very troubling is that he said himself he has been a member of this House for decades now, a very well-respected member of this House, and he did not spend a whole lot of money for his nomination. So why is it that we have to double the donation limit to \$3,300? I don't know where this comes from. I have never heard any Ontarian ever telling me that this is a priority for them, that this is something that is needed in order for democracy to be stronger, for people to have trust that the people that they sent here are there to represent the population and to represent all of them, to do good for Ontarians. Nobody has asked for the \$3,300 limit.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? Oh, the member from—let me see if I can get this correct. How about over here, to the member from Sudbury?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker. Thank you as well to the member for Nickel Belt. One thing that she said right at the beginning of her debate was that we're all coming from different parts of the province, and people have contacted me already about having a difficult time hearing me through my mask and how difficult that can be.

Getting into the money, this reminds me a little bit about the Mike Duffy scandal. Remember when Mike Duffy's friend lent him \$90,000? I don't have any friends who can lend me \$90,000, I don't have any friends who can lend me \$50,000 for a leadership race. I don't have any friends who can lend me \$3,300 as a max donation. I'm really concerned. I had the opportunity years ago—

Interjection.

Mr. Jamie West: That money is getting into this. I appreciate the \$20 donations. Do you have friends who have \$50,000?

M^{me} France Gélinas: No, I don't come from a rich background. My family doesn't come from a rich background. When your dad is the oldest of 14 kids, you don't have anybody in your family who has \$3,300 to give to you, and my mom is number eight of 12 kids, so, no, this is not for Nickel Belt. This is not for me. I have no idea who has asked that they would like the donation limit to be \$3,300. I cannot think of an ordinary Ontarian who wants this. The only people who want this are the people sitting here in front of me, the Conservative members, who feel that \$3,300 is a sum like this. It is not for me. It is a lot of money and there is no way that this is needed.

Hon. Doug Downey: I was listening intently to the angst of the kind of money that puts Ontario in the middle of the pack. Somebody on Elections Ontario's finance database, named France Gélinas, has donated, in 2014, \$2,500; in 2015, \$2,700; in 2016, \$2,030; 2017, \$2,600—and I could go on, Mr. Speaker. There were several max donations to the riding association from other individuals. Mr. Speaker, I wonder if in fact \$25 is the maximum cap in Nickel Belt these days.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I still cannot see where the demand to bring the maximum to \$3,300 comes from. It has never been a request from anybody. I certainly would never request that kind of money from anyone. This is not something that—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to speak to Bill 254, a bill to amend the Election Act. I want to begin by saying that democracy is about serving everyone in this province equally, and that's why I've been a vocal supporter of getting big money out of politics for a long time. Even the appearance that someone with deep pockets can buy access to government undermines confidence in our democratic institutions, and it might raise questions about whether government is making decisions in the public interest.

Undermining trust in government hurts everyone in this province. I think it probably especially hurts the people in this room. It contributes to cynicism about politics and

politicians, and it undermines trust in democracy in and of itself. That's why I am opposed to schedule 2, section 7, of this bill, which doubles donation limits from \$1,600 to \$3,300 a year—which really actually increases donation contribution limits to \$9,900 a year when you take into account that you can do \$3,300 to a candidate, \$3,300 to a party and \$3,300 to a CA. I want to just be clear with the public that since this government has come into office, they've increased donations from \$1,200 to \$1,600, and now from \$1,600 to \$3,300, which essentially is \$9,900.

I want to remind the members opposite of the previous Liberal government's pay-to-play fundraising scandals. Who can forget the media stories about Liberal cabinet ministers having fundraising quotas of, like, \$500,000? That undermined trust in government; it undermined trust in the Liberal Party. That's why so many people worked hard to get the government to lower contribution limits. And to their credit, they actually did it. If you look at the trend across Canada, you're seeing the trend of donation limits going down, not up.

Of course, there are people who say that you can't buy access. I've heard the Premier say that. I remember debating a former Liberal cabinet minister who said you can't do that. But even creating the appearance of it undermines trust in democracy. So I'd ask the members opposite to learn the hard lessons the Liberals learned and remove this schedule from the bill. Let's reduce donation limits, not increase them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Time for questions.

Hon. Bill Walker: I've been listening intently to all discussions this morning, so I'm going to throw this out to all the members of the opposition who have spoken, not just one or two, and also to the leader of the Green Party: If they believe so strongly in this, will they put on record by end of today if they've ever received and accepted the maximum donation limit, have their parties ever received it, and in the case of the NDP, will they actually ask their leader publicly to reject any donation limits over \$500? They want to talk about the minimalist and the ability for \$25 donations, so I would like to ask all of them if they will.

The leader of the Green Party just said that he doesn't believe—talk's cheap. Will you refuse any donations over a \$200 limit? Will you return any that were at the maximum—you or your party or any of your riding associations, because if you're going to say it, you need to be prepared to do it. Will you all do that with your leadership in your party, actually return anything that's over the current limit if you get it in the future?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: To respond to the member opposite, and I appreciate the question, I'll say that I've donated the maximum limit to the Green Party—just to put that on the record—because I believe in what this party stands for.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: That wasn't the question.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: No, no, he did. He asked me a question of if I'd ever donated the maximum or received and accepted. I have donated the maximum, and as a

result, accepted the maximum donation from myself, because I believe in what this party stands for.

But I will also say to the member opposite, the average donation to the Green Party is around 140 bucks. That's the average. We have a small handful of people who donate the maximum. Why don't we create a level playing field for everyone in this province and lower donation limits for everyone?

1550

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Miss Monique Taylor: It's been quite interesting listening to debate go on this afternoon, and thank you to the member from Guelph for his piece.

But I want to address the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I'm going to read this from Hansard from September 26, 2016, on the lack of collaboration regarding changing the rules:

“This no-collaboration, no-consultation approach toward the other parties is downright disturbing and frankly disrespectful. It's part of the undemocratic pattern that we've seen unfold, certainly in my almost five years here. To use a phrase I use because of my riding, it's almost Groundhog Day over and over again. ‘We're going to tell you what's good for you. We're not going to ask for any’” of your “‘input.’ Although they will say, ‘We want to be open. We want to be collaborative. We want to be accountable,’ yet they just steamroll what they believe is best for them, not for Ontarians.”

Could the member from Guelph tell me how he feels about the comments that the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound just said compared to what he said in 2016?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member quoting the member from that time. I actually remember the last time—or when the previous Liberal government got their hands caught in the cookie jar and paid the price for pay-to-play politics. I didn't have a seat at that time, but I do remember actually holding a press conference down in the media studio here at Queen's Park with the leader of the Conservative Party, the leader of the New Democratic Party and myself as unelected leader of the Green Party—all three of those parties calling for the Liberal government to collaborate with the opposition parties to come up with donation limits that created a level playing field for everyone. The Liberals decided not to do that; though, to their credit, they did lower donation limits. But I think when it comes to something that's so vital to our democracy, (1) we should collaborate on it and (2) we should have lower donation limits.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? I recognize the member from Brantford–Brant. You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Will Bouma: Very quickly, does the member from Guelph agree with the other parts of the bill, chiefly the per-vote subsidy extension and the extension of advanced polling days?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Even though the Conservative Party is the largest beneficiary financially of extending the per-vote allowance to political parties, I support it,

because having voters have an opportunity to donate to political parties, whether it's to the NDP, the Greens, the Liberals, the independents, the Conservatives or whatever, is creating more equity in the system. What we should be doing—if we were really about strengthening our democracy in this province, we would lower donation limits to make it more equal for everyone to participate—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. Will Bouma: It's my honour to rise in the House today and speak about a bill that would, if passed, make it easier and safer for people in Ontario and in my riding of Brantford—Brant to vote and participate in Ontario elections. Let me say that again, Mr. Speaker: Bill 254, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, will make it easier and safer for Ontarians to vote and participate in elections.

This legislation, if passed, would protect Ontarians' essential voice in campaigns and strengthen the integrity of the elections process. It will make it easier for Ontarians to vote on election day and in advance polls. Bill 254 will ensure that candidates and political parties can participate fairly.

This legislation will equip Ontario to respond to changes in voting-machine technology and the use of social media. These changes will bring in new accountability measures to protect Ontario elections against those who break election laws or participate in collusion. It will reduce red tape and paperwork for local campaigns and constituency associations. It will help level the playing field for independent members, who are valued members of any Parliament.

Bill 254 will provide responsible guardrails on third-party spending, ensuring that the scale of third-party spending on advertisements does not overshadow the voices of individuals who are willing to stand behind their positions openly and transparently. Speaker, it will protect the voice of individuals and ensure that the people of Ontario are at the centre of democracy in Ontario.

This legislation is proposing changes to update elections to better respond to the challenges of the day, the needs of voters and the ways that Ontarians interact with their democratic institutions. The continued success in delivering elections in Ontario is a testament to the work that has been accomplished over generations. Parliamentarians and election officials have upheld the integrity, accessibility and transparency of Ontario's elections regardless of the challenges that have emerged.

I am sure other members of this Legislature can recall occasions when the government of the day brought forth changes to elections to respond to new and growing challenges, and some of those have come up here in the House today, indeed. Like other legislation introduced in years past, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act responds to the challenges of the day. It will ensure that the electoral system continues to evolve to protect Ontarians' central role in elections while promoting fairness and access to the electoral process for everyone.

This bill builds on previous legislation which had been passed by the Legislature to uphold and update Ontario's

elections. If passed, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, 2021, would help strengthen our preparedness for the impacts of COVID-19, add additional guardrails on the influence of third-party advertising, and add new protections against irregular campaign spending and collusion.

In Ontario, we are fortunate enough to live in a democracy where our constituents elect their representatives at the ballot box. This is a process that we must protect, and as legislators representing our constituents in this place, we must do everything we can to protect that privilege and keep our elections safe, fair and efficient. I would thank Attorney General Downey for introducing this bill which will do just that.

The proposals in this legislation will help to ensure that this essential part of our democratic system, elections, is protected and updated to meet current challenges, including COVID-19. The Protecting Ontario Elections Act is about putting people first and making sure that elections in Ontario are responsive to the challenges of the day, whether that be new technologies in voting or otherwise participating in elections; outdated processes that could better hold bad actors to account; the growth of pop-up organizations spending millions on influencing our elections; or the uncertainty posed by COVID-19.

Before I begin to discuss the proposed changes in this legislation in greater detail, I want to recognize that this legislation reflects input from several key partners who are essential in the administration of elections in Ontario. In particular, I will acknowledge the Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Ontario for producing a special report on election administration last November in response to the risks that surround COVID-19. I would like to acknowledge the Integrity Commissioner for his continued engagement, including his participation at committee. I would also like to recognize the parliamentary assistant for intergovernmental affairs, the member from Parry Sound—Muskoka, Norm Miller, for his invaluable contribution to this legislation. And finally—

Interjections.

Mr. Will Bouma: I just had to throw that in there.

Finally, I would like to thank the Attorney General, again, for introducing this bill which will ensure that individual Ontarians remain at the centre of the electoral process.

As I've mentioned already, Speaker, there are several elements of this legislation that respond to recommendations from Elections Ontario and the Chief Electoral Officer.

Providing additional flexibility for advance polling: The effects of COVID-19 have been felt across Canada, and indeed around the world, and as we all know all too well by now, COVID-19 has required that, for our own safety, we maintain distance as much as possible. All I have to do is look around at how empty the House is right here to see what we're doing here.

When we think about elections in Ontario, we think about lots of people gathering together at polling stations. I'm sure all members of this House can recall such an experience, and now, thinking ahead, it is difficult to

imagine once again being a part of those lines and crowds. It would be far from ideal in our current environment. Ontarians are going to want to be able to maintain a safe distance while exercising their civic duty. That is why we want to make it safer and easier to vote in a COVID-19 environment.

1600

We are proposing to increase the number of flexible advance polling days from five to 10, based on need. Increasing the number of advance polling days would reduce the number of people in a polling station so they can stay a safe distance apart and minimize risk. That added flexibility would allow people to participate in Ontario elections without fear or apprehension. This change could be essential for our next provincial election, but I think it will have an enduring impact into the future in increasing the accessibility of voting more broadly.

We heard from the member from Nickel Belt how the poor people of Foleyet were limited by only having five days of advance polling. I am sure she can't wait, once this legislation passes, to tell the people of Foleyet that they will have 10 days for advance polling.

I know that my constituents in my riding of Brantford—Brant would be thrilled to see this change introduced. Constituents in my riding don't always have the pleasure of accessing a polling station that is right down the road; although I don't think my riding is 160 kilometres big, so I doubt anyone would have a 320-kilometre round trip.

Others, despite living near a polling station, work schedules that are at odds with polling hours.

You do not need to look too far or too deep into the history books to see the demand for this change. The New Brunswick election saw voters turn out for advance voting in record numbers. In fact, more than 133,000 people voted in the two days of advance polls, the most ever in that province. Speaker, this is up from 88,000 voters in 2018.

British Columbia also saw a rise in votes cast in advance polls. According to election officials, in 2020, the advance votes cast as a percentage of total votes increased to 35.4% compared to 30.2% in 2017. Speaker, there has been a greater uptake of advance polling in provinces where elections have been run safely through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ontarians have shown a growing interest in voting before election day in recent elections. In today's environment, we know this additional measure will help ensure Ontario is prepared for any eventuality.

Speaker, I think all members of this House can agree that the independent members are an essential part of the work that we do in this place. They make important contributions and, frankly, come election time, without the changes proposed in this legislation, they will not be on a level playing field. Currently, the independent members of provincial Parliament do not have the same ability or resources as registered political candidates to fundraise outside of election periods or keep surpluses from their campaigns. For too long, election rules have forgotten independent members. Currently, independent members

of provincial Parliament do not have the same ability or resources as registered political candidates to fundraise outside of election periods or keep those surpluses from their campaigns. This limits their financial resources and this is unfair.

If passed, this legislation would level the playing field and provide all sitting independent MPPs with access to constituency associations. They would also receive the related benefits of being able to fundraise outside of the election periods and qualify for constituency associations and voter subsidies, and keep surpluses. Those proposed changes will go a long way to ensuring that the independents are treated equally and have a fair shot in future elections.

I think I'll wrap it up there in the interest of time, Mr. Speaker, but I am glad to have been given an opportunity to speak on this bill here in the House and, again, I would like to thank the Attorney General for bringing this bill forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

M^{me} France Gélinas: An interesting, short speech from a member opposite—I'm just curious: You go through the parts of the bill, but you really did not go through the part that is most controversial. The member from the Green Party, the member from the Liberals, the members from the NDP and the independents all spoke about why is it that we have to increase donations to \$3,300. Do you know why we have to do that?

Mr. Will Bouma: We've already thrown some of those numbers around here. You have many people in your riding who donate the maximum, and they will probably continue to donate the maximum—sorry; through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member from Nickel Belt—if that number has changed. It's patently obvious that going to the number that we want to—which, I believe, is \$3,300—is at best middle of the pack for the provinces, in Ontario, and so this is not controversial. I know there's a lot of hay being made over that, but I think we can focus on the parts of the bill that we all agree on and leave out this small piece. In fact, as the Green leader has also stated this afternoon, he will also be donating the maximum to himself.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Speaker, I just wanted to raise the issue of the money that is spent by the third-party advertisers. I certainly feel strongly that large unions, large corporations, the political action groups that we see in the United States, should not have undue influence with the money that they spend.

To the member: The legislation that you have just described for us, as we know, will require third-party advertising spending limits to begin 12 months before an election instead of six months before. I wonder if you could expand on that a little bit more and comment on that, please.

Mr. Will Bouma: I thank the member from Haldimand—Norfolk for that good question, because it's true: As he said, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act

proposes to require third-party advertising spending limits to begin 12 months before an election instead of six months before. This means the advertising spending limits for third parties would be in place an entire year before an election; however, the spending limit will remain the same, at \$600,000. This proposed limit increase would help to reduce the influence of third parties on Ontario voters. It would also bring the focus back to individuals, helping to protect them from undue influences as well as ensuring that they remain at the heart of Ontario's election process.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Brantford—Brant for his debate. Earlier, the member from Guelph talked about how pay-to-play undermines trust, and the cash-for-access scandal that the Liberals went through. We keep hearing today about how if you have max donors—my in-laws are max donors of mine—then that means they want to donate even more. The argument is, why would you want to raise it? I just have that question for the member opposite. People are in a crisis, a pandemic crisis. They barely can make ends meet. Why are we asking people to raise the max donation? It's not acceptable.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the question, but the reality is, we're going to be middle of the pack if this legislation passes in the province of Ontario, so I fail to see the controversy over this. We're not going to some obscene amount of money; this is standard across the dominion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I guess one of the issues that this bill addresses that really hits home to me was the third-party advertising. I go back to 2014, when the small corporations and unions outspent all three major parties. Just think about that for a while. We're worried about some of the private donations of \$1,600 or \$3,000, but they were talking about corporations making over \$12 million in donations. And you look at some of the tactics they use: When I ran in the 2011 election, the union that my wife worked for deducted \$60 off every employee in that union so that they could spend that against—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Question.

Mr. Jim McDonell: —in the election. That is an incredible amount of money and tactics that just can't be allowed to happen in this province, even though I would hope that she would have voted for me. But she had no choice. That's the way the unions acted back then.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate that question also. It's an important clarification to make as we get into this topic, because we already know that third parties can exert an undue influence on provincial elections by coordinating their message with political parties. So as we get into the concerns raised by the member, our proposed amendment would clearly define "collusion" to help guard against this influence. This proposal is based on the strengthened version of the federal definition. It would like to add more

clarity around sharing information, common vendors, common contributors and the use of funds obtained from foreign sources. We are also proposing that the Chief Electoral Officer would investigate complaints or allegations on collusion.

1610

Our suggested changes would strengthen the safeguards against collusion and, most importantly, protect our elections from outside interference. With these changes we will have the strongest framework in Canada.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: It's hard to believe that we're actually in a pandemic right now when you tune in and you're listening to the debate that's going on here at Queen's Park. People at home are probably wondering, "What are they talking about?" We're in a pandemic, case loads are continuing to rise, ICU levels are continuing to increase, but instead, this government wants to talk about elections.

My question to the member opposite: This bill mandates that elections cannot be held on weekends or holidays. So my question to you is, why are you eliminating elections on weekends and holidays when we all know, and I'm sure you know as well, that many voters from the lower and middle class would benefit from being able to vote on a day off from work?

Mr. Will Bouma: I think it has been proven in the House here before—and the House leader has spoken eloquently on that—how badly the opposition would like to see this place shut down, as we see in the federal Legislature. Yet, on this side of the House, we are prepared to work for the people of Ontario.

Yes, absolutely, we have an existential threat to our very way of life going on right now in this situation of COVID-19, but we will not stop being government and doing the right thing in so many aspects of legislating in the province of Ontario, which includes reforming the elections process so that we can see more freedoms and more strengthening of provisions for individual voters.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: On that line, I've heard the opposition talk so much about the timing of this bill. You've got to remember, this pandemic started over a year ago—we lost a year—and it's not forecasted to be over until into the fall. We have an election coming up in June. I'm sure that if we came out with this legislation in the fall, the complaint would be it was too late.

We know that between every election there is a need to have the Chief Electoral Officer produce a report and to make the changes that he recommends. I guess maybe I'd ask our member on this side just when he would think it would be too late to pass this legislation and give the opposition and the parties and our party a chance to work with the changes. These are very important changes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Brantford—Brant for a final response.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate the question from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. I was involved with the Brant Waterways Foundation for eight years, and I still have a very good relationship with the people there—I’ll get to the point: The question that we were often asked is, and I’m sure you’ve heard this question, “When is the best time to plant a tree?” The answer is quite simple: 25 years ago. Then the next question is, “When is the second-best time to plant the tree?” The answer is, “Today.”

So my answer to your question is simply, “When is the best time to reform elections so that we see stronger provisions made for the people of Ontario?” If we can’t do it 25 years ago, let’s get it done right now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: It is an honour to rise on behalf of the people of Parkdale–High Park to add my thoughts to this bill, Bill 254, the so-called Protecting Ontario Elections Act.

Many of my constituents have written to me; they’re opposed to this bill. I have not heard from a single constituent who is in favour. People are concerned that the government is attempting to stack the deck in their favour by increasing donation limits from \$1,650 to \$3,300 and by allowing every person in a household to each donate up to \$10,000 in an election year. People hear these figures and they know this is not a bill that will help them or their families. Speaker, everyday Ontarians know that only the wealthiest in this province can afford to donate that much to a political party; \$10,000 is a lot of money. They see what this is for: an attempt to bring back the cash-for-access politics that the previous Liberal government was so well known for.

My constituents are concerned about many aspects of this bill, but what they find most objectionable is not what’s in this bill, but rather why the government is choosing to spend precious time on this at all at this time, during a pandemic. Why are we spending time in this House debating election finance laws when there are so many other urgent priorities we should be working on?

Speaker, our province is in crisis. We are in the midst of a devastating third wave that the Premier has walked us right into. Ontario reported another 4,156 cases of COVID-19 today, and another 28 deaths. Our seven-day average of cases is now over 4,000 cases per day and almost 20 deaths a day. Our health care system is under tremendous pressure, and health care workers are stressed, overworked and burnt out. ICU capacity has been pushed to the brink, with over 600 cases of COVID in intensive care. Health care workers worry that there won’t be enough staff to attend to these patients. Hospitals in the GTA have been asked to close pediatric units so that they can treat more adults with COVID.

Things are projected to get even worse in the next few weeks. On Monday, hospitals were asked to cancel elective surgeries once again, adding to the surgical backlog of more than 100,000 procedures. People will be in pain—some may even die—because these surgeries are delayed. We all know someone who will be affected by the cancellation of elective surgeries.

Speaker, we should not be in this situation. More than a year into the pandemic and this government is still so slow to act. The government is ignoring the science of the pandemic. We’ve been warned, and we’ve been warned specifically about the third wave and the frightening impact of variants of concern for over a month. But we are in this situation now, and we need to be doing everything we can to help the people of this province get through this.

So I am confused, and the people in Parkdale–High Park are confused, about why this government is choosing to spend time on this bill. Why are we debating election finance issues when the entire province is in crisis? We could, for example, be using this time to legislate paid sick days. I have heard from countless constituents over the last year about the need for paid sick days. The NDP have been pushing for paid sick days since the pandemic began. The government’s own public health advisers, the science table, endorse paid sick days, because they know that choosing between going to work sick or putting food on the table is an impossible choice. They know that it will only lead to more infection.

We have seen the consequences of not having paid sick days play out in this third wave. Workplaces are driving much of the infection. Essential workers are getting sick at work and bringing the viruses home to their families. Poor and racialized people, who occupy so many of these essential but low-paid jobs in our province, are bearing the brunt of this third wave, as they have the entire pandemic.

Speaker, I want to read from a recent letter from my constituent. She captures this issue well. She says, “With no paid sick leave for those working low-wage and precarious jobs—in workplaces where outbreaks are more likely to take place—there is no ‘safe’ option.”

“It is only when we allocate resources to the communities hardest hit by COVID-19—statistically proven to be low-income and racialized—that we will finally break the cycle of rising cases and rolling lockdowns. By saving lives community-wide, we can avoid future lockdowns province-wide. This is something every Ontarian should care deeply about. The benefit of one leads to the benefit of ‘all.’”

Speaker, she’s completely right. I urge this government to stop wasting time on election finance legislation and instead legislate paid sick days for all workers.

1620

As I mentioned, Bill 254 is an attempt by this government to give themselves a leg up in the next election by increasing donation limits from \$1,650 to \$3,300 and by allowing every person in a household to each donate up to \$10,000 in an election year. Obviously, on this side of the House, we oppose the increase in donation limits to \$3,300 because this move will allow the PC Party to benefit even more from their deep-pocketed donors, and it will allow wealthy donors the opportunity to advance personal interests over the interests of everyday Ontarians.

The NDP believes that the government should work for everyday people. We think that the views of a teacher, a small business owner, a gig delivery worker are just as important, just as valuable as a wealthy developer. As we have seen with this government’s controversial use of

MZOs, there is reason for Ontarians to be concerned that wealthy donors have way too much influence. We want big money out of politics. That is why we oppose these increases.

But this bill also gives cause to question the government's priorities. By raising political donation limits, the government is making sure that the PC Party will be in a solid financial position heading into the next election. But what about the financial position of Ontarians on social assistance? Why does the government not care about them?

Speaker, I consistently hear from constituents on social assistance that the rates are simply not enough to live on. Social assistance rates fall well below the poverty line and have remained stagnant despite skyrocketing housing costs, inflation and increasing prices of basic necessities. Despite this crisis, the government's recent budget contained no increases to social assistance rates. A disabled person on the Ontario Disability Support Program is expected to live with an income of only \$1,169 per month to cover rent, food, utilities and all other basic necessities. The rate is even lower for a person on Ontario Works, who is expected to cover all costs of living with only \$733 per month. To put that in context, Speaker, the new political donation limit is almost five months of income for a person on Ontario Works. I'm going to repeat that again: The new political donation limit is almost five months of income for a person on Ontario Works. Let that sink in.

I want to share a part of a letter my constituent who is on Ontario Works wrote to me. He says:

"I receive \$733 per month." That's "the exact amount I pay for rent and utilities and Internet. To the dollar! I see the government bailing everyone out but us on Ontario Works. Rents are going up. Electricity" is going up. Everything is going up, "but not Ontario Works. I'm panicking here. Please increase Ontario Works payments."

Speaker, folks on social assistance have been neglected by successive governments, both Liberal and Conservative, for decades. The pandemic has made living on such limited income an untenable situation. It was already untenable. This is the kind of problem we should be tackling in this House right now, rather than election finance.

In addition to increasing political donation limits, Bill 254 also contains concerning restrictions on the ability of various interest groups to voice concerns of their members and hold the government to account. We believe that these groups should not be restricted from expressing their views. They represent groups like families of long-term-care residents, health care workers, teachers—everyday Ontarians. We need to hear what they have to say. We believe it is important for groups representing Ontarians to be heard, even if they don't always have the nicest things to say about their government.

When these groups highlight the long-term-care crisis or criticize the government for their repeated failure to manage this pandemic, they provide crucial information for Ontarians. This amounts to the government silencing their critics. We heard at committee from groups representing teachers, for example, that this is clearly meant to

silence dissent from organizations that play a crucial role in our elections. Education is always one of the top issues during an election and if the voices of teachers, communicated through these groups, is prevented from being heard, this will be a disservice to Ontarians. In fact, we heard that these restrictions may be subject to a challenge at multiple levels of our judicial system. Groups like the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and Democracy Watch have raised that possibility.

Speaker, the Premier needs to do more to help Ontarians and their families make ends meet. Small business owners have repeatedly told me that the support that they get from the government is not enough to help them make it through yet another lockdown. What little support does exist has been extremely difficult to access. I have heard from many small business owners in my riding who have reported significant problems accessing the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. Wait times are long, applications are incorrectly assessed and questions are not clearly or promptly answered. I have had a business contact me just a couple of days ago where she was not only approved for the first support grant, but also approved for the second, but still hasn't seen any money at all. She still hasn't received the grants from the first round. Small business owners are tired of waiting for the government to fix the implementation of this program.

Again, Speaker, we're opposed to this bill. More concerning even than the content of Bill 254, however, is what it says about the government's priorities. Ontarians elected all of us in this House to tackle the issues that matter most to them. Right now, getting the third wave under control matters most. Legislating paid sick days and paid time off to get vaccinated, fixing the vaccine rollout so essential workers are prioritized and vaccines are distributed more quickly and efficiently: That's what we should be focusing on in this House, not election finance rules.

Some of my constituents have written to me opposing the bill, as I said earlier. No one has expressed their support for this bill, but constituents are writing and calling my office in large numbers about the safety of their children in our child care centres, which are currently facing a massive increase in COVID-19 cases; 134 cases in child care centres were reported today, and there have been over 1,000 cases reported over the last two weeks. Some 130 child care centres are currently closed; 25% of all daycare closures due to COVID-19 since last summer have occurred in the last two weeks alone. And yet ECEs and child care workers in these centres are not being prioritized for vaccination. This is completely unacceptable. Child care centres, home care settings and most school-based child care remain open during the shutdown. While education workers in hot spots are being prioritized, as they should be, child care workers are being left behind, and we cannot let child care workers once again be ignored and left behind by this government.

1630

Speaker, every day child care workers work in close contact with unmasked children, of course, who do not understand physical distancing. They are responsible for

diapering, toileting, wiping noses. They have the same level of risk as a school board employee, and while schools are currently closed, child care centres remain open.

I heard recently from a worker, an ECE, from the Parkdale Early Learning Centre at Queen Victoria school. Now, because they are not technically employed by the school board, they cannot go anywhere to register to get vaccinated. They work in the same building. The child care centre is located in the school. Why are we leaving child care workers behind? We must vaccinate child care workers now for their safety and for the safety of our children. This is the kind of problem we should be focusing on rather than Bill 254.

Finally, Speaker, I want to say that the housing crisis we're experiencing in Toronto is completely untenable. We have seen the number of encampments increase. If you just take a walk along Queen Street in Parkdale, you will see—it's so visible—how bad it has become. Evictions are not being enforced, but eviction notices are still going out, eviction hearings are still happening.

Right now, as I speak, we have tenants at 55 Triller in Parkdale who are withholding rent from their landlord because the landlord has simply refused to address basic maintenance issues for a very long time. They don't have hot water. They haven't had hot water and heat, even during this past winter, and they've tried everything possible to get the landlords to address their maintenance requests, but they have not seen any action. So tenants have been left with no choice, but to get together to organize and force the landlord to do the maintenance work that is required by withholding their rent.

Similarly, we have another building on King Street West where their landlord is also doing the same thing: not addressing maintenance issues. Speaker, if you're a landlord, you are supposed to provide the basic necessities, and not providing basic things like hot water is completely unacceptable. Once or twice in the case of an emergency—that, we might understand, but for months on end? That shows that the landlord is not willing to take action. So tenants are experiencing these daily hardships. This is what they're living through every day. We have tenants who are being kicked out of their homes even during a pandemic, even during a shutdown.

Please, I ask this government: Let's address the issues that actually matter to the people of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions to the member for Parkdale–High Park?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the member for Parkdale–High Park for her speech on Bill 254. I'm just wondering if the member supports the many changes in the legislation that are recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer. That would include simplifying the rules for nominations; of course, a big one is increasing the number of advance voting days by five; and allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to have administrative monetary penalties to get compliance in elections. There are a number of other changes that the Chief Electoral Officer has recommended many times in his reports that are included in this bill. So does the member support those requests by the Chief Electoral Officer?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to thank the member opposite for his question. I want to come back to something that my colleague the member from Beaches–East York repeatedly points out. I think it's an excellent point and I want to take this opportunity to do that again. The government constantly brings forward legislation that has so many different problems and issues that don't reflect the needs and interests of the people of Ontario. But there are these little things in there, as the member from Beaches–East York calls them, the tidbits: “Oh, there's a small tidbit here; do you support that? Oh, there's a small tidbit in some other legislation”—completely ignoring the bulk of the legislation in terms of the impact it's going to have on the people of this province, forgetting that in bills, for example, such as to do with expanding broadband including poison pills that would take away environmental protections.

Again, I'm going to actually go back to the member and say, let's focus on the substantive pieces of this legislation. There are many issues for it. I think going into these little tidbits and saying, “Do you support this one specific line or these three words?”, that's not what we're talking about right now.

Again, going back to what I just spoke about, the main issue that I want to raise in this House right now is that we're in the middle of a third wave. The province is in crisis. We need to be taking the time to legislate important bills that will help us get out of this pandemic, like paid sick days.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member for Parkdale–High Park for her eloquent speech. Now, as we all know, the average Ontarian cannot pay the current donation limit and statistics show that almost half of Ontarians live paycheck to paycheck. Yet schedule 2 of this bill increases donation limits to \$3,300 and then by \$25 each year. This shows that people with more financial means will have better access to political parties by being able to donate these new maximum donations.

My question to the member: Who is this change for, and why are we focused on increasing donation limits when, of course, we're in the middle of a pandemic and there are many hardships that Ontarians are facing? And what are you hearing from your constituents at the street level? What are their priorities?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to thank my colleague from Brampton North for his question. As I said, nobody from Parkdale–High Park, from my constituents, has written to me—I have not heard from a single constituent in favour of this bill. I have heard from many who are opposed to this bill.

As the member said and as I've said and then as many of my colleagues have said again and again, we are in the middle of a pandemic. The third wave is much worse than the previous two waves that we've experienced. There are so many things, urgent, important things, that we could be debating and legislating right now. But we are instead spending time.

In terms of who it would favour, of course, people are very concerned that this is an attempt by the government

to stack the deck in their favour, because increasing donation limits helps them.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I did listen to the member's speech intently and I respect her opinions on the legislation. I'm going to ask her, actually, for advice, given the fact that I have heard from the members for Nickel Belt, Brampton North and Sudbury talk extensively about the fact we should be focusing only on COVID-related issues at this time. I guess I'm somewhat hesitant, only because last fall at this time the former opposition House leader really took me to task that we were not dealing with private members' business during the first part of the pandemic. When we came back, we wanted to catch up; we used government business to do it.

So I am seeking the advice of the member opposite then, if, as House leader, I should be approaching the leadership of her party to cancel private members' business that has nothing to do with the pandemic going forward. There are a number of pieces from the NDP that have nothing to do with COVID-related matters. Should I be approaching them to cancel that private members' business?

1640

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I thank the government House leader for asking me for advice. I have to say that I think it may be the first time he's asking what I think and, in fact, if I'm not mistaken, it might be the first time he's actually asking what the opposition thinks in terms of the priorities of this Legislature, because as we've seen time and time again, the government, without collaboration, without past practice in terms of collaborating with opposition members in discussing the agenda of the House and moving forward in the best interests of Ontarians—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Many Ontarians may not know this, but oftentimes we have no idea what bill is going to be debated, not only next week but sometimes the day of. I have sat in this House many times just waiting for the government House leader to stand up, to find out which bill we're going to be debating just minutes after he sits down.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions? The member for Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you as well to the member from Parkdale–High Park. During her debate, she talked about a constituency member who is on OW; I forget the exact amount, but just over \$700 a month. And then we heard, in debate, that we're talking about moving the maximum political donation to \$3,300, and then adding, every year, \$25.

I just wondered if you could expand. Since OW has been frozen for so long, what would even \$25 every year mean to constituents in your riding who are on OW?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I'd like to thank the member for his question. It's actually really important, because when we're talking about \$733 for somebody on social

assistance to pay rent, utilities, Internet—you need Internet these days—and other basic necessities, \$25 can make a difference of whether you're going to eat for that week or you're going to starve. It's a big difference.

The road map for action on poverty makes recommendations in terms of increases to social assistance rates. I have to say, those rate increases are actually quite modest. They talk about 3% up to 10% increases. When we're talking about 3% to 10% increase in rates, we're talking about making a difference of only \$25 to \$40, when we need to actually catch up 25 years, maybe almost 30 years, of the rates being frozen.

We know that when the Conservatives were last in power under the Harris government, they not only froze rates but they actually cut them, so we have a lot of catching up to do. We have to increase the rates. We've seen with the federal CERB program that \$2,000 is the minimum that people need in order to survive, especially in an expensive city like Toronto. To the member: \$25 makes a big difference; \$25 means deciding whether somebody can eat for a week or not.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have for questions and responses for this round.

Further debate? I recognize the member from Chatham–Kent–Leamington.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm choked up at that infamous introduction. Thank you.

I am happy to stand here today for the third reading of the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, Bill 254. I also want to take the time to thank everyone for all of their hard work bringing this bill to this stage, as it is now in its third reading, and to thank everyone who has, in fact, participated in the debate process, be it for or against this particular bill. Everyone needs to be heard; that's fair. I also want to thank Elections Ontario for their hard work and knowledge pertaining to an accessible, fair and timely electoral process.

Today, as I talk about the Ontario elections act, Bill 254, I also want you to think about all the history as we talk about why democracy is so vital to us as Canadians, why democracy makes us strong, why we have come such a long way from the start of the democratic process to where we are today, and why these reforms are important in moulding the democratic process as Ontario—and the bigger picture of Canada—adapt and mould ourselves to the change of the times. I could get into the history, dating back 153 years ago—yes, that's 1867—but I would rather get into a few other key points in my presentation today.

When we talk about voting rights, and when it comes down to an election, there are many other rules and regulations that people don't even consider or realize go on in the background. When a discrepancy is noticed, it is up to the government in power to look at the policy and shape it in order to benefit all Ontarians with fair and just provincial elections.

Sadly, today, not everyone shares that same opportunity that we as Canadians do. In 2020, Canada was ranked number 5 on the Democracy Index, with a score of 9.24

out of 10. The Democracy Index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties.

Look, let's face it: COVID-19 has changed it all for a lot of us right now. It's hard to believe that it has already been over a year that we've been battling this virus. If you were to have asked me two years ago where I thought Ontario would have been by now, the pandemic certainly would have never crossed my mind.

The next provincial elections are just around the corner. Who knows where we're going to be 14 months from today? This is why Bill 254, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act, is so important to update and keep fresh, with an evolving population and evolving circumstances. We need to ensure that our democratic system is being protected when we are faced with unforeseen challenges such as COVID-19, and as a governing government, we also need to make it easier and safer for Ontarians to vote on election day and in advance polls.

As my colleagues have mentioned in previous presentations, this bill will change a few aspects of our election process, strengthening the integrity of our election processes and protecting Ontarians' necessary voices for our democratic process, ensuring fair treatment and participation for all parties and participants, and being able to adapt but yet still connect to Ontario with new voting machine technologies and the growing importance of social media influences.

Our new penalties and methods for those who think that they are above the law and decide to choose fraud and conspiracy over Ontarians' rights—they're in for a rude awakening. Protecting the voice of individuals by setting stricter rules and regulations for third-party groups wanting to influence elections to swing to their favour—well, we're changing that. Updating this act is critical, and this government is taking the time to do so.

Voter accessibility has always been important to us, but the importance has never been so obvious as when in a worldwide pandemic such as COVID-19. It has impacted the election process across all of Canada, and since we don't know where we will stand by Ontario's next election, it is best to take the proper precautions now. Ensuring all Canadians, and of course all Ontarians, are able to safely access voting is fundamental. Think of the impact for northern Ontario and far away rural communities who may already struggle.

If passed, the Protecting Ontario Elections Act amendments would increase the amount of flexible advance polling days from five to 10 days. This is because our government sees the need to make it fair for everyone to get the chance to vote, especially in the northern and rural communities of Ontario where voting needs to be planned accordingly to travel distances. This is our government's way of also thinking about the shift workers who are on tight working schedules to have a voice while still being protected from COVID-19 and limit the number of people in polling stations. We're doing this to increase voter turnout by helping make voting easier. The people of

Ontario should be heard, and not being able to vote is not an option.

1650

Now, look, as technology advances, so should we. Adaptation is key. This is what makes us strong. And now that the technology exists, we should exist with it.

Our government is also proposing to create an advisory committee, appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Ontario. This committee will advise Elections Ontario with guidelines for analyzing the best voting equipment that is up to date with the times, that best suits the needs of Ontarians across the province—not of political parties; of Ontarians. Newer technologies make it safer and easier to cast and count ballots, ensuring that we are still following legal protocols.

Let's talk about the enforcement of it for just a moment. Following rules and regulations is what makes this whole system worthwhile and work so well. If people were able to easily cheat and influence elections, the whole process of democracy—well, you know what it does: It collapses.

Enforcing how we run elections is a large part of Elections Ontario. As of right now, if there is a minor infraction, such as a political ad not disclosing who is paying for the ad, it is up to the Attorney General if they are to be prosecuted or not. Our government is proposing to change the act, to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to administer monetary penalties. This will back Ontario with federal practices.

We have some independent members here in the Legislature, so let's talk about them for a moment. As mentioned in my introduction, Ontario has primarily gone back and forth between PC and Liberal governments. We are amending the act to allow easier access to third party members, in order to have similar access to opportunities that those running with a backed party may have. The government wants to make it fair for all.

We're proposing to allow all elected independent MPPs access to constituent associations. We're also proposing individual parties get related benefits, which would include fundraising outside of election periods. Qualifying for constituency association voter subsidies is yet another benefit, and they're allowed to keep the surpluses. As a democratic province and country, it is anyone's right to run, backing their own beliefs, creating their own platform. It is only fair that the electoral process makes it easy to do so.

Now, let's talk about contributions. We seem to have heard a lot from the official opposition with regard to their one single-shot focus on donations. This is a non-partisan idea. You may think it favours one party over another—your people are also allowed to donate whatever they want, as ours and other parties.

Looking at our southern neighbour, we see the millions and, definitely more recently, billions of dollars that are spent campaigning and running their elections each period. Ontario isn't bad, but Elections Ontario has noticed an increase in funding by third parties going from thousands to now millions of dollars, in Ontario especially. Ontario election advertising has now become larger than federal elections.

An interesting statistic pointed out that in the 2018 elections, third parties spent over \$5 million in six months before and during the whole election process. This statistical increase is why our government is stepping in. We want to close the loopholes. We want to keep the electoral process central to Ontarians and, as we go through an economic recovery, ensure our critical democratic institutions remain supported.

If these amendments are passed, it will change four key areas. First, we are wanting to double the personal contribution limits from \$1,650 to \$3,300 per year.

Now, Speaker, I've wrestled with this thought, and I know that if it happened on our side, the opposition would be all over it. Earlier this afternoon, we heard the member from Nickel Belt comment with regard to donations, and she used the terms "white, privileged old men." I take offence to that. I'm not old, but I'm standing up for those white, privileged old men in my riding and throughout Ontario. That should never have been allowed, and I would ask that that member would consider an apology, because if we had made a comment like that, they'd be all over us. I'm just throwing it out there. I took offence. I know she didn't mean malice by it. I have a lot of respect for the member from Nickel Belt; I truly do. But it's the way you said it, how it came out—again, I just wanted to you to be aware that some people took offence to that. Okay?

Raising the contribution limit to \$3,300—

Interjections.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: This hair is not white. This hair is known as Arctic Blonde, just to be clear.

Look, raising the contribution limits allows Ontario to be central compared to other Canadian provinces for individual donations. The new limit is still 23% lower than Alberta and 34% lower than Manitoba and Nova Scotia.

Secondly, COVID-19 has had a huge economic impact on our economy, and that is why we want to extend the per-vote subsidies until December 31, 2024, at the rate of 63 cents per vote. We understand that these are struggling times, and economic recovery doesn't happen overnight.

Thirdly, we want to continue on the decision to ban corporate and union donations. We want third-party advertising spending limits stopped at 12 months instead of the original six months before an election. Reducing the influence on third parties allows for a fair and just election to take place in Ontario.

And lastly: clearly outlining collusion in the act to protect elections from third parties' messaging with political parties.

Speaker, I could go on and on with regard to what our bill is prepared to do, and I'm somewhat disappointed that the opposition chose to focus on one aspect, which is non-partisan, by the way, in terms of allowing—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you. I'm a little bit upset at the fact they just did a single shot on one aspect, and that was basically the focus of their entire debate on this Bill 254.

Speaker, again, I want to thank everyone for giving me the opportunity. We are constantly evolving as a society and our laws do need to mirror changes. COVID-19 has impacted all of us and has made us ask the important questions, especially with the elections quickly approaching. Technology is yet another great example of how we need to adapt and grow together. These changes will help ensure our democratic processes are being protected as we host a fair and just race for everyone involved.

I want to say thank you, Speaker. And with that, I move that the question be now put.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Chatham-Kent-Leamington made reference to the fact that a comment was allowed earlier in the debate by the member for Nickel Belt. It is true that there was reference to old male white guys, but I thought the member was making reference to me, and since it's true, I took no offence whatsoever—just to point that out.

I'm advised there have been six and one-quarter hours of debate on third reading of Bill 254, and we have heard from 13 speakers. Therefore, I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Mr. Nicholls has moved that the question now be put. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard 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 ayes have it.

Call in the members—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred to the next instance of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

1700

Hon. Paul Calandra: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I'm sure you'll find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to see the clock at 6. Agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

SENIOR VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION WEEK ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA SEMAINE DE RECONNAISSANCE DES ÂÎNÉS BÉNÉVOLES

Mr. Pang moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 270, An Act to proclaim Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week / Projet de loi 270, Loi proclamant la Semaine de reconnaissance des aînés bénévoles.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Billy Pang: It is a pleasure to rise in the House this evening to speak on my private member's bill, Bill 270, Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week Act, 2021. This bill, if passed, will proclaim the first seven days of June in each year as Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week. In this week, all Ontarians who interact with a volunteer who is approximately 65 years of age or older are encouraged to wear a yellow-coloured item to display their appreciation.

Bill 270 aims to do two things, Speaker: (1) to show appreciation to Ontario's senior volunteers, and (2) to encourage our senior volunteers to continue to stay active.

Our seniors have impacted and built the province of Ontario into what it is today. Even as they live their years of retirement, a period in their lives when they should be relaxing, our seniors continue to give back to our community through volunteering.

Speaker, I'm a first generation Canadian, originally from Hong Kong. Since arriving in Canada in the year 2000, I have worked, lived and studied in the Markham region. Besides my day-to-day activities, I also found a deep passion for community involvement and I served as a volunteer for various humanitarian organizations and schools in the Markham community.

Before becoming MPP for Markham–Unionville in 2018, I was a York Region District School Board trustee, where I was elected to represent parents and students in the Markham area in wards 2, 3 and 6. During my years as a trustee, I had the opportunity to connect with many seniors who volunteered their time at their local public schools to support the students and their day-to-day events. I enjoyed meeting seniors who found joy in assisting school-organized events such as bake sales, theatre plays and graduations. Every year, the senior volunteers would always be the first to offer their helping hand and it was incredible to reconnect with them every year to hear about the new and exciting events they are partaking in for the time. You can genuinely hear the passion in their voices and that they took part in the activities not because they are obligated to, but because they want to.

Volunteering, as we are all aware of, is a free and voluntary act. It includes someone taking time out of their day to voluntarily provide us service free of charge, with no money involved. It is a selfless deed.

I'm truly honoured to be able to serve and represent Markham–Unionville. Through this role, I am humbled to meet many constituents who share a common passion I'm sure everyone here shares, and that is serving and having the desire to help and making our community and province a better place every day. That was one of the main factors that motivated me to initiate this private member's bill. It reflects the immense impact our seniors have in our province and the recognition that our province can continue to take steps forward to recognize and appreciate

our senior volunteers. Bill 270, Speaker, will be one of these steps.

Ontario has a vibrant community of seniors, persons 65 years and older, who impact their communities through volunteering. Estimates indicate that there are well over half a million seniors in Ontario who volunteer. According to the most recent data available on volunteerism by age group, in 2013, approximately 40% of Ontario seniors from age 65 to 74 years of age and 27% of seniors aged 75 years and older volunteered in some capacity in 2013.

Speaker, seniors volunteer in both informal and formal ways. An example of an informal volunteer activity, which I'm sure many members in the House can relate to, is child care. When our work or schedule changes, or when we want to spend some quality time with our significant other or friends, who do we usually turn to to help look after our children? Our parents. While this kind of activity is not often reflected in volunteer surveys, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge.

On other occasions, our seniors also volunteer in more formal ways. Some of these activities happen in the health, educational, religious and entrepreneurial sectors.

The activity of volunteering itself is not only a giving factor. In fact, a body of research has also indicated that volunteering can improve senior citizens' physical and mental well-being in several ways. This includes providing a sense of accomplishment and belonging to a community or building on life experiences in a positive way.

Loneliness and social isolation are particular physical and health concerns for seniors, as these factors may contribute to elder abuse or fraud or lead to declining social skills. Based on a 2013-14 study conducted by the National Seniors Council, over 30% of Canada's seniors are at risk of social isolation. Volunteerism, therefore, plays a positive contribution to seniors and their mental and physical health by motivating them to stay active and help to combat social isolation by connecting seniors with their communities.

Knowing the negative impact of social isolation and, on top of that, the impact COVID-19 can have on our seniors' mental health, I'm proud that, since the beginning of the pandemic, our government has been taking proactive actions to support and help our seniors. Our government is investing over \$4 million through the 2020-21 Seniors Community Grant Program that will support over 180 community organizations in Ontario develop programs for seniors and focus on addressing many aging-related issues.

To promote older Ontarians' engagement and well-being, especially during this challenging time, the government has funded almost 300 in-person and mostly virtually held Seniors Active Living Centre programs. These fundings are all aimed to help seniors stay connected from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1710

Speaker, I'm sure we all agree that COVID-19 has impacted everyone's life in many and different ways, including the ways seniors can traditionally volunteer their time. Nonetheless, I see Paradise Senior Association

Markham, a local senior-run group, that continues to give back to our community by organizing training to teach all the seniors how to use their tablets and mobile devices. The association also arranged webinars, inviting doctors to speak and answer questions seniors across our community may have regarding COVID-19, health and safety protocols, and the vaccines, of course. These are two of many examples of seniors giving time and energy to our community amidst a pandemic, and these events were all organized and hosted virtually. They may be seniors, but they learn fast.

Last Friday, I was delighted to host the first consultation for Bill 270. I want to thank my two special guests, parliamentary assistants to the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, PAs Ke and Sabawy, and most importantly, the constituents and local stakeholders of Markham–Unionville for attending this consultation and filling out my survey. The amount of positive support I received was remarkable, and it was wonderful to connect with the attendees, including many from the organization Greater Toronto Community Engagement and Family Support Centre, to hear their stories with volunteering.

With the time I have left, I want to share some of their stories with everyone here today. One of the attendees, Mr. Arun Prasad, has been an active volunteer for more than 10 years. For six years, he helped families modify their homes and, for the past year, he has been volunteering for the Ontario Trillium Foundation and others.

In addition to the personal satisfaction and accomplishment, another attendee of the consultation, Ms. Zhang, shared her heartwarming story of volunteering: “When I first came to Canada, I was a first-generation immigrant. And there was no hope of getting a job, so I went to school.” After she graduated, she started volunteering in middle and high schools in the York Region District School Board, and for years, she volunteered. She got a recommendation letter and landed her first job. She really benefited from being a volunteer.

Speaker, our seniors across Ontario have shaped our communities and the province in many ways. For the many things they do for our province, it only fits to proclaim the first seven days in June for Ontarians to come together to appreciate them. I encourage all members of the House to vote in favour of this bill.

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

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Older Ontarians are incredible, hard-working volunteers and community leaders. Senior volunteers lead by caring for others, and they represent an exemplary standard of generosity and looking after our neighbours that we can all aspire to follow.

Before COVID-19, we regularly saw seniors in Parkdale–High Park and across the province contribute to their local communities by connecting with youth in schools—I had a senior who was a reading buddy for my kid in senior kindergarten, in her school—looking after green spaces in parks, coaching sports teams in local arenas and community centres, volunteering with museums, non-profits, businesses and so much more.

I’d like to acknowledge and thank the member from Markham–Unionville for bringing forward this bill to celebrate the contributions that seniors continue to make in our communities. Day in and day out, Ontario seniors dedicate their time and effort to help make this province a great place to live, and I’m glad that this bill helps recognize that.

But this government needs to start doing its part to make Ontario a better place for seniors to live and age as well. While seniors have been continually serving their communities throughout the years, they have been left behind by successive Conservative and Liberal governments who have refused to spend the money to provide seniors with the well-being and quality of life they deserve.

Speaker, Conservative and Liberal governments have drastically underfunded the home care sector, failing to keep pace with the needs of Ontario’s aging population. Older Ontarians want to stay in the comfort and familiarity of their own homes for as long as possible, but they have been forced to face excruciatingly long wait times and less high-quality service than they require. With the COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more important that seniors receive high-quality care in their homes where they can safely isolate, yet many have found it impossible to access safe and dignified care.

At the same time, Conservative and Liberal governments have neglected Ontario’s worsening housing crisis, making it harder for seniors to find affordable places to live that can adequately meet their needs, and this government has privatized long-term care, creating critical staffing care shortages, cutting inspections, creating unsafe working and living conditions, and leaving the sector in crisis. Older Ontarians are thinking about their futures, about how they can age with independence and dignity, and they are terrified they will end in a disastrous long-term-care system.

During the pandemic, we’ve seen the devastating and deadly consequences of the government’s decision to let chain corporations cut corners to pocket larger profits, as wave after wave of COVID-19 spread like wildfire in our long-term-care homes.

Speaker, seniors continue to shoulder the heaviest burden throughout this pandemic. I will be supporting this bill, and I thank the member for bringing this bill forward, but I urge him to work with my colleagues in the Legislature to commit to improving senior care. We need to overhaul home care to help people live at home longer and to end profit in long-term-care homes, and we need investments to help our seniors live in their own homes for longer so that they can live with dignity and comfort.

Let’s celebrate the contributions of our seniors, but let’s also honour and give thanks to them through concrete efforts to ensure their safety and well-being.

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

Mr. Will Bouma: It’s an honour to rise in the House today and speak in support of the private member’s bill of my friend the member from Markham–Unionville and to support him in this way. I love private members’ bills and

the time that we get to spend on them here in the House. It's when the walls that we build between each other in this House come down a little bit—or maybe the wall comes down halfway—and we can work on things together for the benefit of the people of Ontario, and so it's truly a pleasure to stand and speak to An Act to proclaim Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week.

We are all servants of our community, Speaker. We know our communities intimately, and if there's one thing that COVID has shown us all, it's how dependent we are, in each one of our communities, on the seniors who live in our communities. When COVID hit, one of the first things that happened to us with the lockdown in Brantford—Brant was that, because of the harmful effects that COVID had on seniors, our soup kitchens virtually shut down. The whole collection of churches and community groups that serve to feed our most vulnerable was suddenly just taken apart.

Thankfully, in an effort that was spearheaded by the Blessing Centre in Brantford—and I have to say hats off to Terry Howard from the Blessing Centre—they coordinated all that and brought in a whole new crop of churches, and so younger people were filling those roles. But it just struck home to me then how critical our seniors are.

I think we live in a very unique time right now, Speaker, when we can contemplate the idea—for many, anyway—of retirement, and I know there are some members in this House who have been here a long time for whom retirement still seems far off. But the opportunity that we have in our culture with the advent of the ability to retire, to give our time then, when we're done with our working career, to another career of serving in our community, is something that seems to have been taken up by so many in our communities.

So it's such a joy for me to be able to celebrate our seniors in this way, because so often many of them feel like they get left behind by our society. They're no longer actively working and creating for the gross domestic product of Ontario, and yet they're in our communities serving faithfully. It takes, sometimes, something like COVID and the inability for some of our seniors to get out there and be in the communities the way they had been before for us to appreciate that. I would like to say to all the seniors in my riding in Brantford—Brant, who work so hard to fill those gaps, to be there when grandkids come home, to volunteer in those positions—whether it's 4-H or so many different organizations.

1720

I also have to speak of Pat Eyzenga. Pat has been running the Villages in Brantford since time immemorial, if I can say that. Pat always buys at auction a gift certificate that I put into some auction somewhere to have dinner with me, and we have to go to Swiss Chalet. Pat has been instrumental in organizing and running an event that has had to be on hiatus last year, and probably this year again too, called the Villages in Brantford, which is such an incredibly wonderful event where all these cultures—in fact, people who come from Toronto say that it rivals some of the best street festivals that happen in Toronto.

Getting back to the premise of private members' business: In here, when we get to do and work together on things that are for the benefit of all of our communities, it is so deeply pleasurable for me to acknowledge and see good work being done.

I'd like to just finish off by saying to the member from Markham—Unionville, again, thank you so much for bringing this forward. It is wonderful that, I believe, you come from a culture that likes to honour its older members, and I think we have much to learn here on how we can do that. I think this is just such a fantastic step in the right direction.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week, which would recognize the contributions of seniors who volunteer in our communities.

This bill would designate the first week of June as Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week, and it would complement the month of June, as we already know it as Seniors' Month. It's a nice way to recognize the work that our seniors do to make Ontario a better place to live. I see this in my riding quite often. I see it at the Legion, I see it in the public library, I see it at the seniors' centres and in many great organizations across my city.

But I also want to mention the seniors who work on political action while volunteering, such as the ones who volunteer at my riding association in Hamilton Mountain and many others across the province and the country. We typically don't talk about them. I think it's fitting that we congratulate them for giving back to their community in the political arena because that's truly what makes Ontario a better place.

These seniors are a great generation, and they have led by example by caring for others. This is a great initiative to honour their great work. I want to thank all of the seniors of Ontario for giving their golden years to serving their community.

It's even more important now than ever, Speaker, as it's been so particularly hard on seniors in Ontario. COVID-19 and the health precautions have meant that many seniors have been isolated and not able to do the work they love in our community over the past year. The virus has terribly impacted our seniors and their families. The isolation that so many of our seniors are feeling is truly heartbreaking. Before COVID-19, there were so many opportunities for seniors to be social and to volunteer, and the connection that they had to our community is now so challenged, especially since many seniors are having trouble with the online tools to be able to connect with other people in the community. We owe it to Ontario seniors to make this province a place where they can truly thrive.

That's why it's so important for this government to ensure that services are there to meet the needs of our seniors and not to shortchange them. For example, we've heard very clearly over the past several months of the services and care that our seniors are receiving in long-term care. We've heard of home care and the troubles that

seniors are having to be able to stay in their homes longer. These are the things that seniors are calling me and telling me about that they want to see this government bring forward.

The member from Brant talked about the fact that private members' bills are the time when we all come together and we agree on things. He should really pay attention to that, because the only private members' bills that we see being passed in this Legislature are government-side private members' bills. We put forward several private members' bills that would have helped seniors, that would have helped abused women, that would have helped essential workers with mental health, and they all got turned down.

So I'm happy to be supporting this bill. I think that we could do better by the seniors in Ontario. I will leave it there for other members of my caucus to have a few moments to speak on it. I appreciate the time. Thank you.

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

Mr. Rod Phillips: I rise in the House today to support Bill 270, An Act to proclaim Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week, and I do want to thank my colleague from Markham–Unionville for bringing forward this important private member's bill. I agree with my colleague from Brantford that these are opportunities when we can work across the aisle, and in recognizing seniors in particular, who we all know are such an important part of our community.

The MPP from Markham–Unionville, for those who don't know him as well—I consider him a friend—is very wise and thoughtful about this topic. He has worked with seniors in his riding and across the GTA. He has pastored to seniors. He understands the important role that they can play and the important role—and I think the member mentioned this—of this generation, this greatest generation, and how we can recognize them with this humble act, something that I think is truly, truly visionary leadership.

Mr. Speaker, a few numbers, because numbers are interesting, that I think put this into context: The National Seniors Council of Canada, which is one of the leading organizations that looks at issues related to seniors, tells us that seniors in Canada are the most active and engaged group of volunteers of any demographic group. Of course, we all know that from our own experience in our ridings. In fact, their recent study—and this is a 2019 study; of course it would have predated the pandemic—estimates that seniors who volunteer generate an estimated \$10.9 billion in work—in volunteer, unpaid work—and raise over \$4 billion every year. That's a direct contribution from our seniors.

This is particularly important because, as all of us know and as many of us are getting closer to experiencing, the number of those over the age of 65 is growing. In fact, it's projected to double from about the 2.5 million or 17.2% of the population it represented in 2019 to almost 4.5 million, or 23% of the population, by 2046. And in 2016, it was the first time that seniors actually accounted for the largest portion of the population. So all of those volunteer efforts that we have come to appreciate and that we seek to

appreciate and that this bill wisely suggests that we set aside a week to appreciate have the potential to grow and to manifest themselves in an even larger contribution.

We all know that by volunteering, seniors are able to benefit and enhance the quality of life in our communities. We also know that it benefits the quality of life of our seniors. They find a sense of purpose. They maintain their social activity and connectivity with others. They have better physical and mental health. These are not just anecdotal observations; these are the results of numerous studies that I could quote. By volunteering, they remain engaged in the broader community, to the benefit of all of us. This is very much true in my riding of Ajax and across the province, where seniors make a difference volunteering in charitable, not-for-profit and local community groups.

I've had the opportunity to work with many of them, and the list is too long to reference completely, but certainly organizations like the Ajax Legion, the Durham Tamil Association, the Canadian Caribbean Cultural Association of Durham, the ASE Community Foundation for Black Canadians with Disabilities—I'm going to talk about it a little bit later. These are just four of the organizations that, when I looked over at my calendar in the last week, have been doing great work in our community, and again, all under this challenging situation of COVID.

In Ajax, even today, I had the chance to talk to Liza Arnason, who works with ASE Community Foundation for Black Canadians with Disabilities, just one of the organizations. They have not only identified a key niche area for Black Canadians with disabilities that needs to be supported, but she has generated enthusiasm out of our seniors community to support that. This is an example of a new charity. I could easily talk about the Legion or the Durham Tamil Association, who have done work over a longer period of time.

1730

Of course, as one of our colleagues mentioned, the many folks who we get to meet through the privilege of being involved in political activity—the seniors who work on our campaigns are also the seniors who get involved in key community organizations. When it comes to Ajax, I think of Maureen and Linda, just two of our seniors who remain so active in our community, helping various different organizations.

Maureen Farmer, the one lady I'm referencing, has two passions in her life. WindReach Farm is a lovely charity located in my colleague the MPP from Whitby's riding. WindReach Farm provides a farm environment, an agricultural environment, and particularly an opportunity for children with disabilities to take advantage of equestrian and horse-related activities and other activities with animals, to connect in a way that they could not connect otherwise. Maureen is passionate about that, and I have had the blessing of being involved in that activity because of Maureen.

She is also involved with the Durham Welcome Centre. The Durham Welcome Centre, which happens to be

located in Ajax, is a source of support for new Canadians, for immigrants coming to our community, to Durham. Again, Maureen, who is an immigrant herself, serves as that liaison, serves as that connection in the Durham Welcome Centre, and that makes all the difference.

When I talked to Maureen—because in preparation for this, I wanted to reconnect to why Maureen volunteers—she told me that her volunteering keeps her active, and that it's her duty. She sees it as her duty to support her community through these activities, and I think it is very much that sense of duty that some of us a bit younger can learn from our seniors about: that sense of duty that has built this fabulous province, that sense of duty that Maureen shows, that Linda shows, that Liza shows, that all of our seniors show.

Mr. Speaker, many seniors in Ajax and across Ontario share this sentiment. They know that we can benefit from their professional expertise. They know that we can benefit from their time. They know that it benefits them. They know that it maintains their connection for them, particularly as, through the blessings of modern medicine and otherwise, our seniors are living longer, more enriched lives. That sense of connection is so important.

I know it has been referenced, the devastation that COVID-19 has wrought on all of our communities and the challenges that that has posed for our senior community, but again, this is a case where our seniors have stepped up. They have demonstrated that sense of duty. They have demonstrated that sense of connection. They have demonstrated something that all of us, I think, in our broader communities can learn from and can continue to learn from.

Mr. Speaker, again, I'm very pleased to support my colleague's bill. I think this legislation is timely, talking about the value of volunteerism from the generation that can teach the most to all of us about volunteerism. I want to assure this House that I believe this bill will send that message to our seniors in a way that they will understand and will show that we truly appreciate the work that they do.

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

Mr. Jamie West: I want to thank the member from Markham–Unionville for his bill. We have the pleasure of working together on a committee. Bill 270 would declare the first week of June each year Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week, and who could be against a bill to appreciate senior volunteers? I think it's very timely during COVID-19. Many seniors across the province are feeling isolated, and they still want to give back and help others in their community.

I want to tell you a couple of stories about my riding of Sudbury and volunteers there. At United Way Centraide North East Ontario, they have a community volunteer income tax program for the most vulnerable. I'm going to just go off topic for a second, just because of COVID-19. I want to note that they've adapted to COVID-19. They're doing it by telephone, so that people can still have their taxes done. It's for the most vulnerable, and many of the

citizens take advantage of the program. They're seniors; as well, though, many of the volunteers are seniors, and that theme of seniors helping seniors is a very common theme.

I went to a volunteer awards ceremony pre-COVID, and you see a lot of seniors there, as the member opposite had mentioned earlier. I think one of my favourite senior volunteers is Hugh Kruzel. Hugh is the chapter chair of CARP Sudbury, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, and he is active everywhere. CARP advocates for a better quality of life for seniors, and they give back to the community. One of the things they help to do is they help to fundraise for the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association in Sudbury.

As well, there are seniors groups in Sudbury that have been volunteering, sewing and donating all year long, hundreds and hundreds—probably thousands now—of cloth masks for individuals in need. I want to talk about people like Linda Hachez. Linda and her colleagues volunteer in Coniston through a community garden. The community garden has 30 beds in it; they're now going to build a greenhouse. Linda and her friends use the garden to keep seniors active and grow local food. They also use the garden to help teach kids about gardening and to promote volunteerism for the next generation. Pre-COVID, they partnered with a local school and they taught kids how to plant their own garden. They've been doing this for five years.

They also run a seniors-helping-seniors group where they deliver weekly food boxes to three senior residents, which obviously would include food from those gardens, and all that is completely volunteer-based and donation-driven. Think of what it would cost to have purchased that or pay them for this.

Who couldn't support a motion to celebrate people like Hugh or Linda and every other senior volunteer in Sudbury and across this province? So of course we're going to support the motion, but it's important that we don't just celebrate seniors; we have to give them supports as well. As the member from Parkdale–High Park elaborated and Hamilton Mountain elaborated, it's important the government needs to do its part to making Ontario a great place to age.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Je voudrais prendre quelques secondes pour honorer une bénévole de Nickel Belt. Elle s'appelle M^{me} Eva Mazerolle. Elle a célébré ses 90 ans en fin de semaine et, à 90 ans, elle continue d'être une bénévole exceptionnelle. Elle a été membre du conseil d'administration du centre de santé communautaire lorsque j'étais la directrice. Elle a été directrice du centre pour les aînés dans sa communauté. C'est une dame qui n'arrête pas et qui n'arrêtera jamais.

J'ai pensé, en cette journée où on débat d'un projet de loi pour la Semaine de reconnaissance des aînés bénévoles, vous donner un exemple du type de bénévole qu'on pourrait honorer avec ce projet de loi.

Puis Eva, bonne fête.

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

The member has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Billy Pang: I want to thank the members from Parkdale–High Park, Brantford–Brant, Hamilton Mountain, Ajax, Sudbury and Nickel Belt. Thank you for speaking on Bill 270 today. It was a pleasure to hear your support and thoughts on the bill, and it was truly delightful to hear your personal stories with the interaction that you have had with your senior volunteers in your own community.

Ontario has a vibrant community of seniors who impact the community through volunteering. At a time in their lives when they should be enjoying their years of retirement, our seniors continue to give back to our community.

Speaker, Bill 270 is not just any bill. It's a bill that proclaims the first seven days of June in each year as Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week, a week where our community can unite and come together to celebrate our senior volunteers and reflect on the immense impact our senior volunteers have had in our lives. Whether it is volunteering in a local campaign, church, school event or long-term-care home, we can find senior volunteers everywhere, in all settings and occasions. So I want to take this chance to thank organizations across Ontario for giving our seniors a meaningful role and a safe place to volunteer.

Volunteering has demonstrated many benefits for seniors, including reducing isolation and providing a sense of accomplishment. It also creates opportunities, friendships and opens up doors for new adventures. As a volunteer myself, I personally understand how rewarding volunteering can be. Proclaiming a week of appreciation will motivate our communities to show appreciation for our seniors.

Finally, I want to thank our seniors across Ontario. Thank you for your service, and thank you for continuing to influence our province in an impactful way through volunteering.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The time provided 1740

Mr. Pang has moved second reading of Bill 270, An Act to proclaim Senior Volunteer Appreciation Week. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 101(h), the bill is referred to the Committee of the Whole House—I recognize the member for Markham–Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: I prefer to refer it to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is the majority of the House in favour of this bill being referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills? Agreed? Agreed. The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

Pursuant to standing order 36, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough Southwest has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Health. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

I recognize the member for Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: I rise today to talk about the response that I received this morning to my question regarding equity in Scarborough and the closure of two of our large vaccine clinics.

Throughout today—and not just today, for the past few weeks—my team has been getting an overwhelming amount of phone calls, emails and is just really working hard to deal with the overwhelming number of inquiries coming in, with vaccine registration as well as people just struggling with COVID. First, I want to say a huge thank you to my team that's working so hard. I know today especially has been extra hard for them, because a lot of the appointments that have been cancelled—my team helped to book a lot of these appointments as well. A big shout-out to Krystyna, Mayeesha, Prova, Kashfe, Stephane and Zack—all of you. You guys have been doing an amazing job, and I'm so grateful to have all of you on my team.

I asked the minister this morning about why Scarborough has been neglected throughout the past months and months. I mean, it has been neglected for years, and there is enough blame to go between the Liberals and the Conservatives, but over the months of COVID especially, we have seen a really sad way of treatment and an amount of neglect for Scarborough like never before. I want to highlight this, and this is why I'm hoping to take the few minutes that I have to go through some of the issues.

One of the things I get from the minister is a lot of blame for the federal government, for TPH. This morning, the minister tried to actually blame hospitals and Toronto Public Health or health networks, which is really sad, because I understand that the federal government has a responsibility, and I also understand TPH has a responsibility, but we have a responsibility as well. We have a majority government here, and they have just recently proposed their budget—which, by the way, was extremely disappointing because it has zero investment for Scarborough's health care, and we have been devastated for many, many years with cutbacks to our health care system. Just hearing the minister talk about blaming other governments and other organizations when they should be really taking the responsibility—

Interjection.

Ms. Doly Begum: I know the parliamentary assistant is getting eager to respond, but she's going to say the exact same things that I heard this morning and for the many, many months over the duration of COVID-19.

First, I thought I would give some of the numbers, because then we can actually see where we are at. Just as of today, April 14, the government of Ontario has received a total of 4,809,595 COVID-19 doses from the government of Canada; 2,901,795 of those are Pfizer; 1,007,000 are Moderna; and over 900,000 are the AstraZeneca ones. However, to date, the government of Ontario has only administered about 3,422,974 of these doses, so we know the government is holding onto unused vaccines. Do we have a supply problem, or do we have a distribution problem?

You have heard me, Speaker, talk in this House about joining together and fighting for Ontario because I know that four million is not enough. I know we need more vaccines. We should unite and ask the government of Canada to give us more vaccines. But the ones we have been allocated, why aren't these doses going to the high-risk communities that need it right now? Why was the Scarborough Health Network advised that they would receive an adequate amount of vaccines—and I have heard the exact same thing from the minister here, as well, who on record promised me that there will be equal distribution of vaccines given to Scarborough. So why was Scarborough Health Network advised that they would receive an adequate amount of vaccines for those bookings, and then, after the bookings took place, they were denied the supply? That is clear negligence.

Last month, I asked the minister why supply dropped 77%. Can you believe that from the first allocation to the second allocation we dropped 77%? Even if the province was receiving a less-than-expected number of vaccines, why are we not prioritizing hot spots and high-risk communities like Scarborough in their allocation? We have a 24% rate of infection.

Mr. Speaker, I did not realize that I actually ran out of five minutes, because I have so much to say about Scarborough. I'm just so disappointed to—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health can now reply.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I want to thank the member for Scarborough Southwest for the question and for her comments. As she's aware, vaccines are allocated by the province to all 34 public health units. This is done as soon as they arrive from the federal government.

These allocations are made primarily based on population, but additional allocations are provided to public health units with provincially identified hot spots, including much of Scarborough—15 out of 16 postal codes. As she pointed out the other day, there's the edge of a postal code which is really Beaches north, which you could call Scarborough, but I don't think anyone who lives in the city calls it Scarborough. In any event, pretty much all of Scarborough has been identified as a hot-spot community and gets extra allocation. That's consistent with phase 2 priorities outlined in Ontario's vaccination plan.

Let me be crystal clear about this: Every single vaccine dose received by the province is immediately distributed

to a hospital, public health unit, pharmacy or doctor's office and allocated to a waiting Ontarian who has booked an appointment. For example, we received approximately 400,000 doses of Pfizer less than 48 hours ago and those doses are already delivered to hospitals and public health units that will be using them.

Speaker, plenty of Ontarians are waiting for more doses to arrive. Over 2.5 million appointments have already been booked through the provincial booking system alone. This does not include appointments booked through pharmacies, hospital clinics or public health units that are not using the provincial booking system. It goes without saying that many of those booked appointments have been made based on forecast future vaccine supplies from the federal government.

Speaker, we know that the federal government is working hard to try to ensure that the country's vaccine rollout is a success, but that does not change the fact that the greatest challenge to Ontario's vaccine rollout remains a stable and reliable supply of those vaccines. For example, while Ontario received a shipment of Moderna during the week of March 22, it was only 30% of what was originally expected. The remaining 70% of our allocation, 225,600 doses, was further delayed and delivered to Ontario over the Easter weekend. As of Wednesday morning, we still haven't received the 303,000 doses of Moderna that were originally set to be delivered on April 5. The next shipment of the nearly 500,000 doses of Moderna that was due to be received on the 19th is now delayed until the 29th.

These delays in supply from the federal government clearly have real consequences for the people of Ontario and, unfortunately, for the people of Scarborough. Clinics that booked appointments based on scheduled deliveries, and particularly those that administered the Moderna vaccine, are now in a position that they have to wait or cancel some of those appointments for people who have been waiting for the long-promised supply to arrive.

To the people of Ontario, let me say this to you directly: I know that having your vaccine appointment rescheduled is extremely frustrating. We are ready to administer the COVID-19 vaccines and expand to more vaccination sites in every public health unit across this vast province as soon as we receive the doses we need from the federal government. We have shown that. Every time we've received additional supply, we have ramped up our daily vaccinations. Yesterday, we set a new record of administering those vaccines—112,817 vaccines administered—and with more supply we can deliver even more vaccines at even more locations.

Look, I understand your frustration. I was very frustrated when I woke up this morning and saw that the Scarborough clinics were having to reschedule appointments. It's a tragedy; it shouldn't have to happen. But unfortunately, the supply didn't arrive, and that is the situation that we're in.

So what I would ask is: As you said, join with us and help us to get the federal government to get those vaccines

to us as quickly as possible. That's what we want to do. We all want to get everybody vaccinated, and unfortunately all these priorities and everybody crying for "more for my area" is really everybody crying for more vaccines, because we all want to get all of our residents vaccinated, and especially the most vulnerable. It will help us all get through COVID-19 quickly.

I participated recently in a Scarborough town hall with a doctor from the Scarborough Health Network, and I'm

with you 100%: I want everybody in Scarborough vaccinated as quickly as possible, and that's why we're putting all of this effort into doing so.

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

There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1751.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott

Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Tonia Grannum, Valerie Quioc Lim, William Short,

Peter Sibenik, William Wong

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Anand, Deepak (PC)	Mississauga—Malton	
Andrew, Jill (NDP)	Toronto—St. Paul's	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London—Fanshawe	
Arnott, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (PC)	Wellington—Halton Hills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
Arthur, Ian (NDP)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Baber, Roman (IND)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Babikian, Aris (PC)	Scarborough—Agincourt	
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia—Lambton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand—Norfolk	
Begum, Doly (NDP)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bell, Jessica (NDP)	University—Rosedale	
Berns-McGown, Rima (NDP)	Beaches—East York / Beaches—East York	
Bethlenfalvy, Hon. / L'hon. Peter (PC)	Pickering—Uxbridge	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins	
Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
Calandra, Hon. / L'hon. Paul (PC)	Markham—Stouffville	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough North / Scarborough-Nord	Minister for Seniors and Accessibility / Ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité
Cho, Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby	
Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
Cuzzetto, Rudy (PC)	Mississauga—Lakeshore	
Downey, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte	Attorney General / Procureur général
Dunlop, Hon. / L'hon. Jill (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Elliott, Hon. / L'hon. Christine (PC)	Newmarket—Aurora	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health / Ministre de la Santé
Fedeli, Hon. / L'hon. Victor (PC)	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
Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Ford, Hon. / L'hon. Doug (PC)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Premier ministre
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Fullerton, Hon. / L'hon. Merrilee (PC)	Kanata—Carleton	Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Hillier, Randy (IND)	Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
Jones, Hon. / L'hon. Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin—Caledon	Solicitor General / Solliciteure générale
Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
Karpoché, Bhutla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
Kernaghan, Terence (NDP)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Khanjin, Andrea (PC)	Barrie—Innisfil	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe du gouvernement
Kramp, Daryl (PC)	Hastings—Lennox and Addington	
Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga- Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
Miller, Norman (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Rod (PC)	Ajax	
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associée des Transports (RGT) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna Skelly
Teresa J. Armstrong, Toby Barrett
Lorne Coe, Rudy Cuzzetto
Randy Hillier, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Catherine Fife, Mitzie Hunter
Logan Kanapathi, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini, Jeremy Roberts
Amarjot Sandhu, Dave Smith
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Mike Schreiner
Jill Andrew, Robert Bailey
Guy Bourgouin, Stephen Crawford
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Sheref Sabawy
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Gilles Bisson
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Will Bouma, Lucille Collard
Parm Gill, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutla Karpoche
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutla Karpoche
Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocovic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocovic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell