

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

No. 56B

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

N° 56B

2nd Session
42nd Parliament

Monday
11 April 2022

2^e session
42^e législature

Lundi
11 avril 2022

Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott
Greffier : Todd Decker

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111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1180-2987

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 11 April 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 11 avril 2022

Report continued from volume A.

TAX RELIEF AT THE PUMPS ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 SUR L'ALLÈGEMENT DE LA TAXE À LA POMPE

Continuation of debate on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 111, An Act to amend the Fuel Tax Act and the Gasoline Tax Act with respect to a temporary reduction to the tax payable on certain clear fuel and on gasoline / Projet de loi 111, Loi modifiant la Loi de la taxe sur les carburants et la Loi de la taxe sur l'essence en ce qui concerne la réduction temporaire de la taxe à payer sur certains types de carburant incolore et sur l'essence.

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: It's always good to be in the House. It's my pleasure to rise and provide details for third reading of the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, the most important economic decisions are not made at the boardroom table; they're made at the kitchen table. That's why the best place for taxpayer dollars is in the pockets of taxpayers. Since day one, our government has worked tirelessly with this principle in mind, bringing forward a plan to keep costs down, keep costs low and keep the money in the pockets of the people and businesses of Ontario so that they can invest it in themselves, in their workers and in their communities.

Our government recognizes that there are factors that are currently squeezing families and businesses. The cost of essentials, from gas to groceries, is going up. The impact is particularly felt by low-income families and workers, and people and businesses across the province are searching for relief. They're searching for a plan to combat these inflationary prices, which are not unique to Ontario, but which governments nonetheless have a responsibility to address. Our government is laser-focused on addressing this problem, doing everything we can to keep costs down.

The Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, would, if passed, temporarily cut the gas tax by 5.7 cents per litre and the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre for six months, beginning on July 1, 2022. This relief would put money back into the pockets of people and businesses, so they can use their hard-earned dollars how they see fit. Vehicle owners in Ontario would see significant direct savings from this proposed gas tax cut and the recently announced elimination of licence plate sticker renewal fees and refunds of fees paid since March 2020.

Monsieur le Président, le « Tax Relief at the Pumps Act », 2022, s'il est adopté, réduirait temporairement la taxe sur l'essence de 5,7 cents par litre et la taxe sur les carburants de 5,3 cents par litre pendant six mois à compter du 1^{er} juillet 2022. Cette baisse de coût à la pompe remettrait de l'argent dans les poches des personnes et des entreprises, qui pourraient ainsi utiliser leur argent durement gagné comme bon leur semble. Les propriétaires de véhicules en Ontario bénéficieraient d'économies directes importantes grâce à la réduction proposée de la taxe sur l'essence, à l'élimination récemment annoncée des frais de renouvellement des plaques d'immatriculation et au remboursement des frais payés depuis mars 2020.

Moreover, households that do not own vehicles are also expected to benefit from the impact of the proposed tax cut in the prices they pay for things like taxis, food deliveries and consumer products.

We have heard loud and clear from people and businesses that they want help with rising costs so they can focus on what's important. That's exactly why our government has brought forward this bill.

But of course, we can't do it alone. Governments of all levels must come together to address cost-of-living increases. That is why our government is also calling on the federal government to join us in helping to keep costs low for families and businesses. That includes the price at the pump.

In 2018, our government implemented legislation to eliminate the previous government's cap-and-trade carbon tax, reducing gas prices by 4.3 cents per litre and home heating costs, saving households on average \$260 a year in fuel and other costs and removing a costly burden from Ontario businesses, allowing them to grow, to create jobs and to compete around the world.

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However, the federal government implemented a rapidly escalating carbon tax, starting on April 1, 2019. It rose to 6.63 cents per litre of gasoline in 2020, and 8.84 cents per litre of gasoline in 2021. At the beginning of March, prices at the pumps skyrocketed, but the federal government moved ahead with another carbon tax increase on April 1 of this year, bringing this to 11.05 cents per litre of gasoline. That's why, Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to call on the federal government to help fight rising costs by cutting the carbon tax.

Now, in addition to keeping costs low for families, workers, seniors and everyone in Ontario, the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: The Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, would benefit Ontario businesses that use gasoline or diesel. Many small businesses across Ontario use gas as part of their daily operations, whether that includes delivering goods to their customers or paying travel costs for their employees. Relief at the pumps would put dollars back into their businesses so they can reinvest it as they see fit. It's all part of our government's plan to keep costs down for Ontario families.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is part of our broader plan to keep costs down, cutting costs for millions of Ontario vehicle owners by refunding licence plate sticker renewal fees paid since March 2020 and eliminating licence plate renewal fees on plate stickers on a go-forward basis, saving vehicle owners \$120 a year in southern Ontario and \$60 a year in northern Ontario for passenger and light commercial vehicles.

We have permanently removed tolls on Highways 412 and 418.

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member from Whitby for that round of applause and his advocacy to make that happen. Before their removal, Highways 412 and 418 were the only north-south highways with tolls in the whole of Ontario—the whole province, Mr. Speaker. Permanently removing these tolls on these highways will relieve gridlock on local roads across Durham region, encourage economic growth and provide families and businesses with better transportation options and more predictable travel times.

When we talk about affordability for families, so often we are talking about people who have no other way to get from point A to point B—families in the north and rural Ontario parents corralling their little ones into a minivan to get them to school or daycare on time, or a couple of seniors looking to get their weekly shopping done with minimal hassle and plenty of space to load groceries. What's more, there are families who have children with disabilities, families that must use their own vehicles and equipment. The bottom line is, getting around via car needs to be affordable.

Another measure to keep costs low for families includes the historic agreement we recently reached with the federal government for \$13.2 billion in funding for our Canada-wide early learning and child care system, providing Ontario families who have children five years old and younger in participating licensed child care centres with up to 25% in savings, to a minimum of \$12 per day, retroactive to April 1, 2022. This agreement will deliver an average of \$10-a-day child care for eligible children by September 2025. This is an agreement for families that will significantly reduce child care costs for working moms and dads. Given how complex Ontario's child care system is, we took the necessary time to land an agreement with the federal government to lower costs for families across the whole province.

Mr. Speaker, our plan to keep costs low also includes relief during tax season through Ontario's tax credits and benefits. Our Ontario Child Care Tax Credit allows

families to claim up to 75% of their eligible child care expenses, including for care provided in child care centres, homes and camps. The Low-income Workers Tax Credit is also helping keep taxes low for many people in Ontario by providing up to \$850 each year in Ontario personal income tax relief to lower-income workers. Our jobs training tax credit is helping workers get training that may be needed for a career shift, retraining or to sharpen their skills. Our Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit is helping make seniors' homes safer and more accessible so that they can stay in their homes longer. And through the Ontario Staycation Tax Credit for 2022, Ontario residents can claim 20% of their eligible 2022 accommodation expenses when they file their tax returns next year. Mr. Speaker, the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, which we are discussing today, builds on this plan to provide relief for families and businesses.

On the topic of affordability, the dream of home ownership should not be out of reach for any person in Ontario. Our government's recently introduced More Homes for Everyone Act outlines the next suite of concrete actions the province is taking to address Ontario's housing crisis. This plan, built on recommendations from the Housing Affordability Task Force and the first-ever provincial-municipal housing summit, will deliver both near-term solutions and long-term commitments to provide more attainable housing options for Ontario families.

We have also brought forward measures to crack down on foreign real estate speculation with the recent, most comprehensive non-resident speculation tax in Canada. We have increased this tax rate to 20% and expanded it to apply province-wide to strengthen efforts to deter non-resident investors from speculating on Ontario's housing market. Our government is working to increase supply and help keep costs low for Ontario families and homebuyers, not foreign speculators looking to turn a quick profit.

Ontario is also working with municipalities that are looking to establish a vacant home tax, which is just another tool to increase the supply of housing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the bill we are discussing today would bring relief to businesses that use gasoline or diesel, and this relief is part of a broader set of measures to keep costs low for businesses. That includes, for example, supporting a reduction in Workplace Safety and Insurance Board premiums; allowing businesses to accelerate write-offs of capital investments for tax purposes; reducing the small business corporate income tax rate to 3.2%; lowering the high business education tax rates for job creators; and increasing the employer health tax exemption.

Through these actions and more, the Ontario government is working to keep costs low for people and businesses in Ontario. That includes small businesses, which are a critical component of Ontario's economy and communities. Employing more than two million people in communities across the province, small businesses in particular have felt the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and our government will continue to advance measures to keep costs low so these businesses can recover and thrive.

I'll now cover some of the implementation details for the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022. In order to cut gas and fuel tax for six months to provide relief for businesses and families, this proposed tax cut would be effective July 1, 2022, to provide the industry the required time to adjust their systems and business processes. This includes manufacturers, wholesalers and, of course, retailers. This implementation time is required because of the way gas and fuel taxes are paid to the province, which includes pre-collected taxes.

I'll take a moment to explain how this works. Gasoline and fuel tax is imposed directly on consumers, and to facilitate the collection of this tax, an amount equal to the tax is pre-collected by designated collectors and importers at the wholesale level and is included on the invoice to the retailer. The retailer, in turn, recovers the tax amount when the sale is made to the consumer.

If the legislation is passed and the rate decreases on July 1, 2022, importers, wholesalers and retailers that hold tax-paid inventory at the time of the rate cuts would be required to take an inventory to receive a credit in the amount of the difference. Consumers would be charged the lower tax rate beginning on July 1, 2022. In this instance, the Ministry of Finance would provide a tax adjustment for registered collectors and importers to reimburse them for the adjustment they will provide to their retailers.

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Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Finance will support the industry through this transition, including hosting outreach sessions in the coming weeks to educate and work with the industry on delivering this proposed tax change.

I'll take a moment to touch on Ontario's gas tax program. This program supports public transit in municipalities across Ontario by providing two cents per litre of provincial gas tax to improve and expand transit. Municipalities will be pleased to hear that the Ontario government will ensure that this funding would not be impacted by the proposed cut we are discussing today.

In closing, it's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak about the Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, as well as our government's plan to keep costs low for families and businesses. To restate its benefits, this bill would, if passed, temporarily cut the gas tax by 5.7 cents per litre and the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre for six months, beginning on July 1, 2022. Vehicle owners in Ontario would see significant direct savings from this proposed gas tax cut and the elimination of the licence plate renewal fees, bringing relief to people and to businesses. The Ministry of Finance will work together with the industry, including gas and fuel tax collectors, registered importers, wholesalers and retailers, to implement this proposed cut for people and businesses. And with respect to the Ontario gas tax program, which supports public transit in municipalities across Ontario by providing two cents per litre of provincial gas tax to improve and expand transit, the Ontario government will ensure that this funding would not be impacted by this proposed cut.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to support this important bill—all members.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I will.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you.

Rising gas prices are hampering affordability for both families and businesses, who have pulled together to show grit and determination in the face of the pandemic.

To get shovels in the ground for critical infrastructure like highways, like hospitals, like high-speed Internet; to set the right conditions for good, well-paying jobs as Ontario workers build the Ontario-made electric and hybrid vehicles of the future, it will be a plan that will continue to keep costs down for every person in every part of the province.

We have moved to combat the cost of living. For those who are now facing inflationary pressures outside of their control, governments must act to address cost-of-living increases to support seniors, families, workers and businesses so they can keep more of their money to invest as they see fit, to benefit every person across the province, to grow Ontario's economy and support a strong family, worker and business environment for everyone in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, our government looks forward to, in the coming weeks, releasing our ambitious plan to build on the measures we have highlighted today. It will be a plan for setting Ontario on a path for long-term growth and prosperity and, as I said, to get shovels in the ground for critical infrastructure like hospitals, like long-term-care facilities, like housing, like high-speed Internet; to set the conditions right for good, well-paying jobs as Ontario workers build the Ontario of the future. It will be a plan that will continue to keep costs down for seniors, for low-income workers and for families. It will be a plan to build a stronger Ontario for every person in every part of the province.

I urge all members to support this important bill. The Tax Relief at the Pumps Act, 2022, would help lower costs for people and businesses to make life more affordable and put tax dollars where they belong: back in the pockets of Ontario's hard-working people and businesses.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We have questions.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Speaker, I have a point of order, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): On a point of order, the member from St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I'd like to correct my record. Earlier, when referring to the member from Kiiwetinoong's community, I said "your people," when I meant to say "your community," and I regretfully misspoke.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The first question from the opposition goes to the member from Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: So many in my riding of Scarborough Southwest—frankly, Scarborough and Ontario have been struggling with the cost of the living. And I have listened to the Minister of Finance talk about gas prices. In fact, the price of gas has been rising under this government. When this government took office, Speaker, it was about a 4.3-cents-a-litre increase for people who were going to the pumps and they had to pay extra. Not only did

this government not reduce it, it actually increased. We have seen this go up and up since then.

Right now we have a bill here, 53 days before the election, that the government is proposing, once again promising the reduction of gas prices, which will take effect after the election—so interesting. My question to the Minister of Finance is: How can people trust this government on anything they ever say, especially a promise like this, when they make it right before the election?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member opposite for that question. Let me remind the member opposite that upon taking power in 2018, this government moved very swiftly to, in fact, lower the price of gas at the pumps by 4.3 cents, not increase—lowered it by 4.3 cents.

And, Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite knows that we have geopolitical issues going on in the world that drive gas prices and supply chain issues higher that are not made in Ontario. But what this government has done since day one is reduce the cost of living for many Ontario people and families. It started right from the beginning in the first budget: lowering the individual and family tax rate through a tax credit. It's positioned Ontario to have some of the lowest personal income tax rates in Canada for those making under \$30,000. We started that on day one. We've continued that with this price cut as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The Associate Minister of Digital Government has a question.

Hon. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the Minister of Finance for his excellent remarks and the incredible work he is doing for the people of this province as being the Minister of Finance and providing relief to the people of this province. Thank you so much, Minister, for the great work you are doing.

Speaker, the minister and I had, on numerous occasions, the privilege of sitting for some consultation, especially during the budget consultation. What we heard was especially businesses, but also the people of this province, are looking for some relief. I know that this gas tax cut is just one tax relief. Could the minister go into some details about how this tax fits into the government's plan especially to cut costs and help keep life in Ontario affordable?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the Associate Minister of Digital Government, who is doing a fantastic job moving this province forward. Thank you for your service.

Let me tell you that our plan has been a plan to support the people of Ontario since day one. The minister mentioned that this is just one component, one part of a plan to keep the costs of living lower for the people of Ontario. I just mentioned the LIFT tax credit, which is helping low-income workers in Ontario.

Let me highlight another one that we put in place two years ago: the child care tax credit, again, to help people with families who are struggling with payments, to provide relief for child care costs. We doubled that, Mr. Speaker, in last year's budget, providing additional relief for those families. And it gets even better than that, Mr. Speaker: We signed, a couple of weeks ago, an historic

child care deal in Canada—an historic deal to provide \$10 a day child care for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Hamilton Mountain has a question.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to be able to ask the Minister of Finance a question. Municipalities count on the 2% portion of the gas tax to be able to support transit in their municipalities and various decisions. Due to COVID, that money was low. So the Minister of Housing had offered and promised \$120.4 million to top up during that COVID time.

1800

Now we're seeing the same announcement on April 4, 2022, again to the municipalities, due to this gas tax reduction—another \$120.4 million. Can the minister please confirm if both allotments are going to municipalities as has been promised, or is it just one, with a double announcement?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the member opposite. She's right that we have supported municipalities through many, many means as they've addressed the effects of the pandemic on transit ridership, on shelters and supportive housing. As a result of this relief at the pumps that we're proposing today, we have ensured that municipalities continue to get the relief that would be going their way as a result of this. So that's not impacted at all.

Let me go a step further, because in the fall economic statement, I put an additional—I believe it was \$325 million—\$325 million to support municipalities for gas tax relief and for support for the lower transit ridership. So in fact, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite, we have delivered.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Whitby has a question.

Mr. Lorne Coe: The finance minister has been a real steward for the residents of the region of Durham, the champion of a number of initiatives that have made significant differences not only in Pickering–Uxbridge but across the region of Durham. When you speak about municipalities, this is the type of bill that's going to have a significant effect on Durham region's economic recovery plan.

Can the minister speak a little bit more broadly about the effect that he sees of this legislation, along with some of the other initiatives that he's been a champion of within his own riding of Pickering–Uxbridge?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you to the terrific member from Whitby and my colleague and friend in Durham region. One of the reasons that I ran, Mr. Speaker, was I felt that the people of Durham didn't have a voice at Queen's Park. It was important that it was Durham's time to receive the support from its elected members in the region.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, to the member from Whitby's question, we have delivered for the people of Durham. I'll start with the tolls on the 412 and the 418 that this member has championed for years. It was that party, of course, supported by the opposition, which put those tolls on—put

these extraordinary taxes on the people of Durham. We moved to take those tolls off, not only temporarily but permanently. We're continuing to invest in providing good infrastructure and jobs for the people of Durham. I'll have more to say, I'm sure, in the next answer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Next question.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the Minister of Finance for his presentation. He mentions the concept of keeping costs down, but unfortunately, at odds with that is the notion that this is a temporary measure; it's only five months for reducing this. I have to ask, where is the government's stamina?

I'm hearing from constituents in my community who are concerned that this is nothing better than bread and circuses. People are looking for real long-term relief. And earlier, government members seemed unaware that freedom-of-information requests revealed that this government chose not to collect a billion dollars from an international conglomerate. My question is, why did this government throw away a billion dollars that could have been a wise upstream investment in mental health, health care, housing or home care?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation has, I believe, effectively answered that question over and over again.

What I will remind the member opposite of is the permanent nature of the carbon tax increase, which is now 11 cents a litre—which, as my colleague mentioned earlier, is going to \$200, impacting the price at the pumps. In fact, just a few weeks ago when we called on the federal government to pause or cut the carbon tax in response to the pressures on the people of Ontario and the people across this country, what did they do? They increased the price at the pumps by 2.2 cents a litre, up to 11 cents now since they started implementing it in April 2019. So I'll let the member opposite reflect on who's increasing the cost of living in this country and who's bringing it down.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to rise in this House. I was just thinking tonight, although I disagree philosophically often with the Minister of Finance, I have had great discussions with the Minister of Finance and I'm glad to see him back. I know what you went through, because I went through it too, so nice to see you back.

We're talking today about I believe Bill 111, the gas rebate at the pumps; I don't have the title exactly right. It's been an interesting day, because on behalf of the opposition, I put forward an opposition day motion to provide relief to northerners regarding the price of gas, regarding the overall price of the extra cost of living in the north. One of the reasons that directly impacted our decision to do that was that it has been our experience in the north that the retail price of gas bears very little relation to some of the other prices across the province. I drive back and forth from northern Ontario every day, and I just

go to the near north, but we haven't seen evidence that this tax reduction will actually go long term to the pumps.

I appreciate the Minister of Finance explaining how the process works. I really appreciated that. But it hasn't been our experience, because there has been such a wide variation. There could be, if you go all the way to Kiiwetinoong, but just from here to the north of my riding, there's sometimes 40 cents.

We've actually had open houses about the price of gas, and often, it's, "Oh, it's transportation." Well, I know a little bit about transportation, because I used to have a lot to do with transporting milk. Transportation per litre adds about two cents, and sometimes the farther gas it takes farther to transport is more or less. It doesn't bear a true relation, and that's why we are very concerned about this bill, because this bill doesn't actually have anything in it to ensure that those prices are actually transferred in places where there isn't serious competition.

We had a big supporter in our questions regarding whether the gas companies actually transferred and never gouged consumers. Do you know who that supporter was, Speaker? It was the Premier in 2018, just after he got elected. He had a speech:

"Doug Ford warned oil companies that they're being 'watched' and called on them to pass any savings he gives them to the price at the pump.

"We're going to have a frank discussion with the oil companies'....

"I'm going to be watching every move, every move they make'....

"It's called the free market,' he said. But 'when you have four or five oil companies, it's called a monopoly, too.'"

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I allowed you to finish your sentence, but then I also want to remind you: Even though it may say a person's name, when you make reference in the House, you should always change it to the title. Thank you.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. My apologies.

But he laid it out. Actually, the Premier at that time, his thoughts and his remarks reflected what northerners feel about gas prices: that gas prices that we pay have very little to do with the rest of the province.

1810

That's why we introduced an oppo day—and I will take from, I believe, the finance minister—to rebate northerners directly so they can invest that money where they see fit, because this bill does not ensure that it will be passed through where there isn't a lot of competition. It doesn't. The Premier was worried about it in 2018, but there's nothing in this bill that says it's going to be passed through. We wanted to pass it through directly.

Again, I appreciate the ability to debate in this place; I really do. We often disagree. As the opposition, we don't have that many opportunities to put forward legislation or to try and direct the government. And yes, we are responsible for the votes that we make, but the fact is that today we put forward an oppo day and the government

chose to block that vote. Now, they didn't break any rules. I'm not accusing anybody of breaking any rules. But they chose to block that vote.

If they totally disagreed—totally disagree that this is the wrong way to do it—that is their right. But I question whether it was their intent or whether—no, “intent” is the wrong word. Whether they had the right to block—and something they may very well disagree with, but they blocked the vote.

Northerners have a legitimate concern that this tax rebate might not be transferred to them. Our winters are longer. Our distances are farther. Most of us don't have any sort of public transportation. We are at the mercy of the gas pumps. For reasons unbeknownst to us, there are often massive price differences. We were looking for a way to make sure that government funds—because when you do a tax cut, you are giving up government income but without a guarantee that that will actually reach all parts of the province.

The government can very well disagree with our position that it should be sent directly. I fully understand that, that they disagree. But they shouldn't have blocked the vote. Disagree or agree, that quite frankly is an affront to northerners. The fact that you blocked the vote with—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: And the debate—but the vote, because it stated clearly in that motion what the issue was. The main issue is that there's no guarantee that that is going to transfer down.

We've heard from several members that the trickle-down effect—you know, because you pay less for this and it trickles down and trickles down. It's supposed to work like that, but in the words of the Premier: It's called the free market, but “when you have four or five oil companies, it's called a monopoly” too.

We were trying to find a way that northerners wouldn't be impacted by the monopoly effect, and we were blocked from doing so. I'm very disappointed. Again, they didn't break any rules, but I'm very disappointed that the government took that tack and didn't allow a vote on an issue that is a crucial issue to people in northern Ontario. It's a crucial issue to people across the province, but in northern Ontario—when people go to work in my area, if one's going to work at Tim Hortons and someone else has got a shift on the other side of town at Wendy's, do you know what? There's no subway, understandably. There's no streetcar. I have one municipality that has buses. In the rest of the municipalities, there are no buses. Actually, my biggest municipality right now just lost their taxi service. There is no way other than a car—and actually, for most people it's a truck, because a lot of people in northern Ontario don't feel safe driving anything else.

We're very concerned that this may sound very good on paper—5.6 cents, and “It's going to make so much difference”—but what is stopping gas from being 35 cents' difference instead of 30? There's nothing in here. Even the Premier acknowledged that there's a risk of this. Even the Premier acknowledged it, and do you know what? I very, very rarely agree with the Premier, but on

this one I do. There is a chance of gas-gouging, and it happens in places where there's not a lot of competition. It happens in smaller areas in northern Ontario—it happens in other parts too, but that's where it happens.

We should have been allowed to vote on that oppo day motion. I regret that we didn't have that chance—I deeply regret it—but I am thankful that I have had this chance to speak on behalf of northerners. We care about the price of gas. We depend on our vehicles. But we need some kind of guarantee that this will actually trickle down to people who actually put the nozzle in the tank, because it hasn't been our experience in the past. I would say that the Premier knows that, and perhaps the Premier chose not to have this vote; I don't know. But he does know there's a risk, and there's nothing in this legislation that mitigates that risk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The government House leader has a question.

Hon. Paul Calandra: To be clear to the member opposite, it was his own party that chose not to have that vote—full stop. The member opposite could have joined with the Liberals to ensure that debate continued on that, but they chose not to. They chose not to bring in enough members to vote down the motion we had brought forward.

Now, if the member opposite could explain to me, he and the members opposite were very passionately against taxes: “We have to bring them down for the gas in the north.” That's what we want to do, that's what this bill is about. Last time we did it, we saw gas prices come down one cent, two cents, three cents, four cents, five cents. Do you remember the member for Unionville in front of the sign as it came down?

Now, the member perhaps can explain to me: How, on the one hand, can you vote against this and yet support a \$200 carbon tax? We heard just now that it's 11 cents a litre for the people in your community because of the increase in the gas tax, which you are in support of, which your party supports and wants to see increased to \$200. How do you balance the two?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Just in time, I guess, he got his question in. Back to the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Actually, there are a couple of good questions in there. If we had had the numbers to defeat that motion—we didn't. You have a majority. You used that majority, and you had the right to do that.

As for the carbon tax, since I've been here the NDP has never supported the carbon tax here; we supported cap-and-trade—two different things. Now, the Conservatives call it the “cap-and-trade carbon tax,” but the only reason we have the carbon tax in Ontario is because the government chose not to employ the cap-and-trade system—which is, again, their right. They chose to do that. But they could have implemented something on their own so that we wouldn't have had to pay the carbon tax. The carbon tax is being paid in Ontario because the current Conservative government chose to scrap the system that was in place instead of looking for something better or keeping to employ it.

1820

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Brampton East has a question.

Mr. Gurratan Singh: So I want to look at the track record of the Conservative government. After four years, we've seen housing prices double, we've seen gas prices shoot through the roof, we've seen auto insurance shoot through the roof. Life is getting so unaffordable for people across Ontario. How can Conservatives talk about affordability on one hand, when in reality they've done everything possible for their insider friends in big oil, insurance companies and development, instead of standing up for Ontarians?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thanks to my colleague for the question. I can't speak on behalf of the Conservative Party, and I don't have any desire to. I think that they truly believe in the trickle-down effect: that if you help the big, that it will slowly trickle down to the bottom. In a lot of issues, in a lot of areas, that doesn't happen, Speaker, and I think that that is proven over and over again, and it's the difference in our philosophies.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The government House leader is back on his feet.

Hon. Paul Calandra: So let's drill down on this, Mr. Speaker, because the member opposite suggests that cap-and-trade doesn't cost the people of Ontario anything, that he's in support of cap-and-trade. Now, the billions of dollars that were put onto the tax bill because of cap-and-trade, he suggests just magically didn't cost us anything. Now, we saw when we eliminated cap-and-trade that gas prices came down. I said it; the member from Markham–Unionville will know: one cent, two cents, three cents, four cents, five cents. Magically, when we eliminated cap-and-trade, it came down. It's a carbon tax by another name.

So again I say to the honourable gentleman, is it your intention—because your party is campaigning on a \$200 carbon tax—are you now suggesting that you are not in favour of a carbon tax, that you are not in favour of a cap-and-trade-system which taxes people, and that that is the reason why things have been so difficult in the north? Are you suggesting that? Because that is a new policy, yet again, for the NDP.

Mr. John Vanthof: The government House leader asks very tough questions. And he's also trying to put words in my mouth. I did not say that the cap-and-trade system was free; I said it was a different system than the carbon tax—and there is no free ride.

I didn't say the cap-and-trade system was free. When you cancelled cap-and-trade, then it was replaced by the carbon tax. If you had come up with a different system, then we wouldn't have to deal with the carbon tax. Would it cost money? It is going to take money to transfer into using less carbon—it is—but the difference is between coming up with your own system that's the best for the province, or defaulting to the federal system, including the federal carbon tax. That's what you've chosen to do: default to the federal system.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Davenport has a question.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I've been listening very carefully to the comments from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. And I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I was here earlier today as well to listen to the debate that was supposed to be taking place here on the official opposition motion, and I was really, deeply disappointed. I think I share a lot of the disappointment of other members of my caucus, that the government actually shut down debate and discussion and—this is very important—did not allow for northern MPPs to have an opportunity to share the voices of their constituents here in this Legislative Assembly. And I've heard the government's arguments. They don't make sense to me. This is political survival by limiting debate. That's what this government's focus is right now: political survival by limiting debate.

I was in Sault Ste. Marie a couple of weeks ago, and let me tell you, it was just shameful to see the member from Sault Ste. Marie—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please. Member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, you're making a lot of noise this afternoon.

We ran out of time on the question. I think you get the gist of it. I return to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: We put forward an opposition day motion, which is our right. The government chose—and again, they used the rules of the House; I'm not disputing that. They used the rules of the House to shut our debate down. They also used their majority. Again, that is the way it works. But whether or not that's the way it should work, that is a question—whether or not they disagree with what we proposed, that's a whole different issue, but the fact that they did what they could to prevent the vote, that shouldn't happen, and unfortunately today it did.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The government House leader is back.

Hon. Paul Calandra: So I used my majority to shut down the vote, colleagues. I brought in 30 of my 67 members, because I believed the motion they brought forward was not worth the paper it was written on. They could not, between the Liberals and the NDP, muster more than 30 of their members to come in and vote in favour. So really, it was the NDP who voted against their own motion yet again.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to drill down to the more important part. Because the member opposite again admitted, whether it's cap-and-trade, whether it's a carbon tax or any other scheme that you want to bring forward, it's going to cost the people of the province of Ontario, and more in the north, more for fuel. That's what he is suggesting. That is what he's in support of. Despite the fact that his party supports a \$200 carbon tax, he's also suggesting that no matter what we do, we have to do it, and it's going to cost people more. How, on the one hand, can he vote against this measure, which puts more money back in the pockets of people and campaign for more costs on the people of the north?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, a tough question from the government House leader. I'll focus on the second part. We have to lower our carbon output. Climate change is real. And there are actually ways to do it—I'll talk about agriculture. There are ways to do it. We could use cap-and-trade funds to actually help farmers.

One of the biggest issues right now—and this is pretty interesting. Nitrogen is one of the biggest fertilizer costs in the province, and it's also a pretty big part of our emissions in carbon. Actually, you can make nitrogen from the sun: anhydrous ammonia. You can make it from the sun. If we could use some funds to do that, we would be self-sufficient in nitrogen. Now, that's a way to transition. You want to be self-sufficient in PPE? I want to be self-sufficient in nitrogen to grow our own crops, to grow—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): And I want to continue the debate. Nobody over here? Anybody over here? I can flip a coin. You're not getting up? You're not getting up? Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Parsa has moved third reading of Bill 111, An Act to amend the Fuel Tax Act and the Gasoline Tax Act with respect to a temporary reduction to the tax payable on certain clear fuel and on gasoline. 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.

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

Third reading vote deferred.

GETTING ONTARIO CONNECTED ACT, 2022

LOI DE 2022 POUR UN ONTARIO CONNECTÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 11, 2022, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 93, An Act to amend the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 / Projet de loi 93, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d'Internet à haut débit et la Loi de 2012 sur un système d'information sur les infrastructures souterraines en Ontario.

1830

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Timiskaming-Cochrane had the floor when we adjourned the debate earlier this afternoon. I return to the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Again, it's always a pleasure to debate in this House. On this broadband bill, I commented when we debated this at second reading of this bill, and I would like to put it on the record again, that this bill, although we have some differences on how broadband—we have some questions on how the plan is going to work.

Specifically, this bill contained only issues about broadband. It didn't contain any poison pills. It wasn't an omnibus bill. It was a bill about broadband.

We supported it at second reading, and it went to committee. There were amendments made; we supported the amendments. And we will support this bill at third reading. There is a saying that even a broken clock is right twice a day, and on this one, that's their second time today. But we do have questions on the overall government commitment to bring broadband to each and every home and business by 2025.

I spoke this morning that one of the issues that the government didn't bring forward at second reading or third reading—I didn't hear anybody mention it in the lead-offs—was the affordability issue, because part of the digital divide is, even if it's there—Starlink is already there, and I believe the government is already dealing with Telesat, which is a similar low-altitude satellite, like Starlink—but the price point is also fairly high. So for a lot of people, the fact that it's available—it might be physically available, but not financially available. Somehow we need to address that. And maybe the government is addressing that. They haven't said. They haven't explained that.

Another issue that I think needs to be put on the record once again is—and I'm not trying to be critical; we're just looking for more information. The way I understand this is supposed to work—actually, the member from Oshawa has done a lot of committee work on this. So the province has been divided up into lots, basically broadband lots. I believe it's 92?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Ninety-three.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's 93 lots—

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's why we called it Bill 93.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: That's a pretty good one. And these lots are for sale, or were for sale—providing the service within the lots was for sale. These lots are put up for sale in a reverse auction, or a Dutch auction; that's what reverse auctions are called.

The way I'm envisioning this is the approved bidders have access to what the lots are, the boundaries of the lots. Now, that's not access to the public. It's also not access to a lot of small broadband suppliers, because I polled many in my riding and they didn't have a clue what I was talking about. Actually, in my riding, some of the ones that actually do try to provide the service to the smaller, outlying areas really haven't heard of this. That's a concern. I'm not criticizing, I'm just saying that that's a concern.

Another thing that we don't 100% know is what level of service actually each lot is going to get, because depending on where the lot is, some lots might get fully fibre optic cables and some lots—I am not an Internet technical person; I think everybody has figured that out by now—are going to get wireless, which is good but it's not the same. The speeds are slower on some systems; not all of them. This morning when we were talking—I can

assure you that when I had high-altitude Xplornet, when I first got it, I had great customer service from Xplornet. I always had great customer service when I called, because I had to call a lot, because the more customers they got on that satellite, the slower the speeds got, to the point where I couldn't use it. Even someone who has as low needs of broadband as I do, I couldn't use it.

We don't know if the same thing is not going to happen after this program is rolled out. We don't know what the parameters are. We don't know if the people in my lot—I don't know how big the lot is, either. I live in one of those lots. My constituents live in one of those lots. But we don't know if they're actually going to get access to cable, to high-altitude, low-altitude, and what actually their download/upload speed is going to be. We don't know. I think that's something that we should know.

That's something that the general population should know, actually what broadband is, what service they're going to get, because when we talk about farming—and I know a bit about farming—a farm with robotics that has fibre optic going to it is in a lot better situation than a farm with satellite. There are some farms that use cellphone data to run their robotics, and that is incredibly expensive. But those details we don't know, and that is—again, for me not knowing, I am going to be quite frank, Speaker, I shouldn't—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's never dealt with in the bill.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, but this is an issue in providing broadband.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Through the Chair, please.

The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, you're getting close to a warning this afternoon, sir.

Back to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker.

This morning, when I listened to the government leads, they spent an awful lot of time talking about the benefits of Internet and the benefits of high-speed. They spent very, very little time talking about the bill; almost no time talking about the bill itself. So I don't think that I'm out of line talking about broadband itself, no. The member might not like it. I want to get out of here, too, but this is going to impact people in Ontario for a long, long time, because even if the government makes their goal—and there are some challenges, specifically supply line challenges, so they might not make it—once the government says they've made it, there's no changing.

Do you know how I know that, Speaker? I've made this speech before—911. You would think that everyone in Ontario has 911. No, they don't. In my riding, quite a few people don't have 911. They can't get on the system. Now, you would think that would be—because when people come to my camp, and quite a few people use my camp, we're not that far from the town, and the town has 911. Then I have to explain how you have to—we've tried to get 911. The member from Nickel Belt has put bills forward on this issue to actually make 911 a universal service. Everyone outside this House thinks it is. Many people in the House have heard this before and deal with

it in their own ridings. But you ask someone on the street, "What do you call if you got a problem?" "You call 911." Everywhere. Well, that's not the case.

1840

I'm sure when 911 was implemented across the province, it was a happy day, and it should have been—is—but the people who didn't get it at the time are out of luck, and that is going to be the same—very well could be the same—with this promise of broadband for all. If it didn't quite work, well, I guess you're just going to have to go to the neighbour or go to the next town. They may seem like trivial things sitting here, but they're not, because, if you want everyone to be able to operate at full capacity—personal capacity, professional capacity—they all have to have access to something that is necessary in our modern world, and that's broadband. We recognize that; the government recognizes that.

We put a motion forward in 2018 to start the process. We put forward a motion for a billion dollars, way before COVID, to implement something like the province of Quebec was doing. The government voted for it. We identified the issue; so did they. At the time, the Minister of Infrastructure came to me, talked to me afterwards, talked about the motion and said, "You know, that's a lot of money. I don't know if we'll be able to swing that." That was pre-COVID.

The next thing we put forward—we put a bill, and I can't remember what—we put a bill forward calling for broadband to be an essential service. One of the members, in the leads—I believe they split the lead up with three or four people, which is great, but they talked about how broadband should be an essential service. We fully agree. We put forward a bill to make it an essential service. It passed second reading. The government never brought it any further. But it is. I think we all recognize that it needs to be an essential service, but it needs to be an essential service for everyone and in every lot.

The fact that the process is going forward and a lot of people who actually provide those services now aren't aware of how the process works is ringing a little bit of an alarm bell. I'm going to be really blunt: If it's just the big players that are bidding on the lots—the big players never provided the service to the little places before. Why would they do it now?

I'm not being critical. I understand how the system works. The places where broadband is a for-profit business—I understand for-profit businesses. Before I got this job, I ran a for-profit business. I started with a mixed farm and ended up with a dairy farm because I made more money milking cows than anything else. I understand for-profit, and so do broadband companies, because you wouldn't invest in a company whose motto is, "We don't care if we make money; we just want to provide service to everybody." You wouldn't invest.

There are certain things the government has to deal with. But that is the question for these lots, because if there's a lot that gets a bid and there are a lot of very difficult areas to serve, areas that are not ever going to

make money for the companies serving them, what happens when the initial rollout is over? What happens?

I've got an example of this. The public owned a fibre optic trunk line that went through northeastern Ontario. It was owned by the ONTC, and it was sold to Bell and it was sold at quite a discount. The line was—Bell, they're a good company; again, I'm not criticizing Bell. I'm not. I understand the profit principle. They got this line, and the company was Ontera that provided the service to the outlying areas, on the lakes. My daughter is close to the Ontera line. When she called to get Internet: "Oh no, we don't do that anymore." They wanted the trunk line, but they didn't want the little customers, because there's no money in it. I understand that.

But we don't know how this reverse auction—maybe someone will be able to tell me—is going to get around that. Because once the program is over—if it makes it by 2025, or even if it doesn't make it by 2025, there are some questions. It sounds nice: Everybody is going to have broadband, just like everybody is supposed to have 911. But how are we going to ensure that that actually happens? On that part, there has been very little information, very little.

I think that if we have a concern about this broadband issue—we all know how important it is. We all know, especially with COVID—home schooling, working from home—it's incredibly important. No one is going to deny that—no one. And it should be accessible all over. Actually, one of the things stopping people from moving to where housing is more plentiful and cheaper is lack of broadband service. So it's a win-win, but we need to be sure that it's actually going to work long term, that everyone is going to have broadband that is still keeping up with the times five years from now.

That's crucial, because this moment isn't going to come again. Once this program launches—I guess it has launched. I think the reverse auction is actually going on as we speak. But you're not going to do this over again. The government wants to wait take credit, and they're taking lots of credit for it. When you take lots of credit for it, make sure it's done correctly. The fact that we're not that forthcoming with the information causes some concern, especially for people in my part of the world and in the member for Kiiwetinoong's part of the world. I'm the MPP and I can't get 911 on behalf of my neighbours. That tells you that it's not that easy to get. We don't want to have the same thing happen in two, three, four or five years from the broadband initiative, because we need it.

My last point: There may be parts of the province—and we haven't had an answer to this either—where there are lots that aren't feasible, regardless of the auction. There are parts of the province where no one is going to really want to provide the service. What do you do then? It's a legitimate question. I'll give an example. On my farm, I live at the end of a dead-end road, and it was maybe three miles. Lots of land, but it cost a lot of money to put those hydro poles in there. It probably never made money for Ontario Hydro to do that, but it was public and everybody ended up paying for the cost. So it never really made

money for Ontario Hydro, but my farm, over the 100 years, and now it's longer, that I—not just me, but my predecessors; I look pretty good for 100. But over the years, it produced a lot of milk for the economy. It made the economy and the township and the town lots of money—lots. But Hydro One, if there hadn't had been public participation to ensure that that service kept going, the whole economy would have lost, and that's what's happening now. We are losing because not a lot of people have service.

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So we're hoping that this reverse auction works. We understand it's the first time it's ever been tried. Usually, I never buy the first model of a tractor and the first model of a car. You wait until some of the bugs are out, and I'm hoping that some of the bugs are going to be worked out.

Anyway, we support the bill—no problems with the bill. I think you're all sick of listening to me, and it's been a long day, so with that, Speaker, I will conclude my remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has a question.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker, and I appreciate you allowing me to stay, too.

I want to thank the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his address this evening. I really appreciate the fact that he's going to support the bill. I also understand his obligation to speak, and he's trying to surmise or possibly look into the future at what this bill may not answer. If this bill or any other bill answered all the questions, we could just shut this place down, and I'll go home and never come back, because all the questions would have been answered.

But I do want to say to the member, on balance this is the largest investment in broadband in the history of the country. In fact, we're putting more money into broadband and the expansion of Internet than the federal government is total across Canada. Would you not agree that this is a most positive step for the people of Ontario?

Mr. John Vanthof: Now, to be 100% accurate, it is the largest—and we agree on the broadband—it is the largest broadband announcement in the history of the province, but if you look at the last four years, the actual investments that have been made have been much less than the announcements, have been decimal, decimal, decimal the announcements.

The minister had that question this morning and the minister said, "Well, we're not going to pay anyone until they actually provide the service." So the reason that hardly any money has flowed is because none of these contracts are actually working yet. So far we've had a lot of announcements and goodwill. Again, we all want this to work but so far it's the biggest announcement but not the biggest provider of broadband.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Oshawa has a question.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Well, I do. Thank you very much, Speaker. I listened, of course, not just today to the remarks, but we sat together on committee and have both

had quite an interest in broadband. But I actually want to ask the member about natural gas or other opportunities for the north or for the rural communities to get their fair share of service. I wanted to ask him, do you have any worries about broadband? If all is fair, do you have any worries about it rolling out? Do you have faith in this government? And how are your neighbours feeling about the odds of getting quality service in their communities?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Where I developed some concern with this program is when I polled my local broadband providers, who knew nothing about this reverse auction. Maybe they weren't big enough, but they knew it was blank. They're the ones that are actually out there trying to provide the service to the nooks and crannies, and they don't know about the program. That tells me that the big players are doing the bidding, and maybe the big players are going to subcontract, but that didn't give me a warm, fuzzy feeling when the guy who I buy my Internet service from, who does a really good job, who has put towers all over—you would love this guy: entrepreneur of the year. He knew nothing about this program. That didn't give me a warm and fuzzy feeling.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I did want to expand on that. You kind of answered the question, but the minister did say, "We don't pay the bills until the service is rendered." These contracts are out there. The work has already begun. Some of it isn't finished yet.

I would ask—you're a milk producer. Did you get paid for the milk when you said, "Oh, Bessie is a real good cow and she's going to produce real well," or did you get paid for the milk when you actually delivered the product? That's what—we're going to make sure we're responsible to the people of Ontario and we're going to pay for the product when it's delivered.

Is that not the right way to do it, I say to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Let's find out.

Mr. John Vanthof: I really appreciate that question, because I talk about cows a lot. You know what? Dairy farmers get paid twice a month for the milk that they produce. Right? But we also don't announce for four years how much milk we're going to produce and then not produce it and then crow about how we're producing so much milk. That is what the government has done for the last four years. You budget \$30 million, spend zero; the next year, you budget \$200 million, spend 1.7%; the next year, you budget—I'm going by memory—\$400-and-something million, you cut it by \$270 million and then spend nothing again.

Again, we want this to work. Yes, we get paid when we produce the milk, but we don't crow about it for four years first.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Brampton North has a question.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his speech. Of course, in

Brampton North, broadband is not an issue, is not a concern. The majority of people have high-speed Internet, as well as many of the members here, aside from the northern members. In this bill, there's no mention of rural Ontario, there's no mention of Indigenous communities getting broadband. We talked about 911. Of course, the member mentioned Nickel Belt and how essential that is.

Why do you say that making it an essential service is important in the bill, and what sort of benefits would there be to have it in the bill making broadband an essential service?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member from Brampton North for that question. It's a good question. If it had been included in the bill that it was an essential service, or if rural had been included in the bill, or First Nations, Indigenous, it would have given more confidence that these things have actually been considered.

Again, I keep saying this: It's my job to be critical, but when you don't know, then that leads to lack of confidence. These lots—basically, you divide the province into a subdivision, and there are some choice parts of the subdivision and some not-so-choice parts. We want to know how the not-so-choice parts are going to be serviced, and why they weren't mentioned in the bill.

Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The Attorney General has a question.

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm so happy that the Minister of Infrastructure is moving forward on this, and I guess I want to give some reassurance to the member opposite, because my area, which are large rural areas connected with some urban areas, in the rural areas, there are projects under way in the ground, some complete and to be completed very shortly. In Springwater, there are over 1,300 homes in that state, and in Oro-Medonte, there are over 1,800 homes being connected. Some are already done and there are more on the way.

You were talking about needing examples, and I just wanted to pass on that there are real examples out there, and I'm glad that the party has joined us in moving the infrastructure forward when the Liberals really did nothing but talk about it and actually put no money on the table. Our \$4-billion investment is the largest in the country.

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Mr. John Vanthof: I didn't really hear a question there, but I really appreciate the comments. I think we can agree that, prior, there was a lot of talk of Internet and not a lot of action on it. But my question to the Attorney General is, and I know I'm not supposed to ask the questions, but were those projects—and there are also projects in my riding, done by entrepreneurial people—part of this new reverse auction? And that's the question, because there are some very good initiatives: SWIFT, EORN—some very good initiatives. We're not saying nothing is happening, but this reverse auction is a whole new kettle of fish, and a kettle of fish where there's not that much information, and it's supposed to be the answer to everybody's problems.

But if it's just the big guys dividing up the province and then kind of subcontracting to the little guys, I don't know

if it's going to be, in the end, any better. It's a legitimate question, because we've asked for the boundaries of the lots, and we have been denied.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): It's like question period. You can ask a question. It doesn't mean you're going to get an answer.

Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's truly a pleasure to stand tonight and speak to this. It was certainly entertaining listening to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I'm going to try to provide a few answers to some of his thoughts, as well, in here.

But Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by saying how anybody can't get behind a \$4-billion historic investment to connect every single person in Ontario—I just can't fathom anybody would not be voting for this, regardless of where they come from on the political stream. Conversely, the Liberals, in 10 years: \$530 million towards broadband infrastructure. I'm just going to point out, because I may not get a lot of opportunity to speak in the House for the next 22 days, but I want to remind the members opposite, the official opposition, that they kept the Liberals in power at least two more terms than they needed to be when they tripled the debt.

How many homes could have been connected had they not been spending money on debt payments? How many of the people that the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane—and he's a great guy; I've always respected and admired him, but I'm going to talk about a couple of his points. He talked about 911—absolutely critical—but their government supported the Liberals, who put a measly \$530 million in. There's \$4 billion being invested in this, Mr. Speaker. This is something that is going to change and transition our economy. It's going to transition our communities.

One of the members—the member from Oshawa, I believe—mentioned natural gas. When I had the privilege to be the Minister of Energy, I rolled out the natural gas program, and I'm quite proud. I think she asked a question, something to the effect of, “How can you trust them? How can you know they'll deliver?” Mr. Speaker, we added an extra \$100 million. It was overwhelming, the demand. It was over a billion dollars in demand for that project. I went and I fought to get an extra \$100 million. And we did it with a very fair and transparent process that, again, broke the province into four quadrants to make sure there was equal allotment throughout those.

Of course, before we came to power, much of the urban area was done, and that's great; you're serving the multitudes. But all of our small communities need and deserve that equal access. So we've been continually trying to improve that. I would ask them to give us at least the benefit of the doubt, from that perspective that we have done things in an equitable manner, in a fair manner, in a transparent manner. I also left a recommendation that we continue to support that program the way it is, because we can continue to try to hook up many of those small, rural communities with that as well.

Mr. Speaker, two very specific groups that have received funding, and I'm just going to give a couple of

stats here: As part of this \$4 billion is the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology, or SWIFT as it's called in southwestern Ontario, which I am very, very excited about. Over 63,000 homes and businesses across southwestern Ontario have already seen an increase in high-speed Internet access, and an additional 53 projects are currently under construction and are expected to be completed by June 2023. In the eastern part of our province, EORN, the Eastern Ontario Regional Network—I believe my friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who I think you've mentioned a couple of times today, Speaker, while sitting in the chair, is very excited as well, because in his part of the world up there in Barry's Bay, eastern Ontario type of world, they are going to actually have 350 new telecommunications sites and upgrade over 300 existing sites. So we are again looking at different places across the province.

Very specific to my area is the ability to engage and partner with a company called Telesat. Their main head office is out of Ottawa—very, very significant holdings there. But just in West Grey—many people confuse that it's in Hanover, because it's right adjacent, but it is in West Grey, Ontario, one of my municipalities—\$109 million was delivered by Ministers Fedeli, Surma, Thompson and myself, when I was in the role, for low-Earth-orbit satellites: \$109 million in Telesat. I believe they're going to be investing upwards of \$5 billion to \$6 billion. Again, in some cases like rural, remote and northern Ontario, and even in the Bruce Peninsula, you don't want to be drilling through all of that rock. You maybe sometimes can't, or the receptivity isn't good there. So you can utilize these low-Earth-orbit satellites, which is fabulous. I think what we've really seen—and I applaud the minister herself and the government. We're looking at different ways. We're not saying it's only one or the other or all or none. We're looking at satellite, we're looking at fibre and we're looking at wireless connection, wherever that's going to work best, to give people connectivity. Like my friend from Timiskaming–Cochrane, there are places in the good old Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound where sometimes you lose your cell signal or you don't have great Internet. So again, it is a big, significant piece that we're trying to do.

Improving connectivity for Ontario—ICON: Again, close to \$125 million of provincial funding has been committed through the ICON program, which is bringing high-speed Internet access to as many as 65,000 premises.

I've talked about SWIFT and I've talked about EORN. These are great across our whole province, Mr. Speaker.

Now I'm going to change gears a little bit and talk a fair bit about my own great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I'm so excited because of the developments, and it's been interesting. And even within the challenge of COVID, a pandemic that none of us anticipated, none of us have ever lived through, there were no manuals you took off the shelf that said “Solve your issues here.” But it certainly was, again, an eye-opener for many that people can live on the beautiful shores of Georgian Bay or Lake Huron and do their work from there. They didn't have to be in an urban centre. They didn't have to leave their

hometown if they didn't want—not that people won't, and so they should if they so choose. But it really opened my eyes as to what this could do, and it's why we made that historic \$4-billion investment to connect Ontario.

It's going to impact education. I look at the Bluewater District School Board and the Catholic schools, Georgian College in our backyard and the emergency training duties facility that's at Georgian College. These things now are accessible to the world because of connectivity and the ability for us to be in—whether it's in Owen Sound or Tobermory or Chatsworth or Meaford, any of these areas, you can now be connected to the world as we implement this across the great province.

Health care, of course, is impacted. Even back in my day, when I was executive director of Bruce Peninsula Health Services Foundation, we did a \$3-million capital program back then, and part of that was what was called PACS, picture archiving and communication system. I remember back in that time the ability that you could have a specialist in Australia looking at your knee to make sure we understand what happened to you on the weekend and we can fix that knee of yours, and we don't have to jump in a car, particularly in the middle of January in a snowstorm, to get somewhere. We can utilize technology. That really, in my mind, levelled the playing field.

Again, 911 and the ability to call for emergency service: As the member across said, we want that. That should be in every single place. We're trying to pick up the pace that was dropped by the Liberals for 10 years that they could have done to make sure that that does happen.

Agriculture: incredible. I was down in Arthur, I think about two and a half years ago, at a little workshop that they were putting on, I believe the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Speaker Arnott was, of course, there. It was in his riding. But it was incredible, again, to be able to see the technology and how it's being—but it's not just technology as in there's a computer; it's being able to forecast and understand what that weather pattern is going to do. It's being able to utilize that system to analyze on the fly and put your fertilizer in the ground as systematically and as efficiently and effectively as possible. But they need that connectivity to be able to maximize and utilize that innovation that is already there.

I can't say enough about business and jobs, as I said earlier. Just think, Mr. Speaker, you live in a nice place as well, in Windsor–Tecumseh, but just think of being on the shores of Georgian Bay and Tobermory all year round. Even in the wintertime it's beautiful there, in my mind, and lots of people are travelling to see the grotto in the winter and the ice formations. And you've got your laptop or your tablet or your computer or your cellphone, and you can do business virtually around the world. It is really going to make a level playing field for us who live in rural Ontario to be able to compete with anybody in the world.

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Cape Croker Park: Think of that, Mr. Speaker—one of the most beautiful pieces of geography and scenery in the world, I believe. You can be camping with your cellphone and you're going to be able to still stay connected to your

loved ones, you're going to being able to do business and have as equal access as anyone.

Fathom 5 national park—again, a little plug for our federal folks and the great things in our own backyard in Tobermory, the diving capital of Ontario. This connectivity is going to allow us to be on board with anyone.

When I'm talking to businesses—there's a young fellow here that may be listening tonight. His name is George Goettler, and I just want a little shout-out to him. I don't believe his parents' company and his grandpa's company has ever actually been put fully in Hansard—so tonight, as a tribute to GG Goettler of Dublin Fine Furniture, which has been in business for 65 years, serving people. For many years, it was probably more of a geographic issue that they couldn't probably travel as far, but now they can compete with the world, and I know they compete with the world. GG Goettler of Dublin Fine Furniture, your grandson is doing a great job at Queen's Park and your son is doing a great job here at Queen's Park, and you should be proud of him too.

In our little neck of the woods, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, which I've had the privilege and pleasure and honour to serve for the last 10 years, I'm just so excited about what getting connected is going to do for the sustainability, for the future for my children. I have a 24-year-old, Ben Walker, and a 27-year-old, Zach Walker. This is going to allow them the opportunity, if they so choose, to stay at home and have a good, well-paying job and a career and life that we want to be able to have. If they move around the world, that's up to them, but this at least allows them. For many of years, many of us in rural Ontario saw a lot of our friends, their children and friends that we grew up with have to leave our areas because they just didn't have the ability. This is going to truly be game-changing, as the Premier often says.

There was a lot of talk about the reverse auction and the lots, and just the big companies. In my neck of the woods, we, of course, have Bell and Rogers—the big players—but we have some small companies that are doing fabulous work, and I just want to put them on record: GBTel; Rural Net; BMTS, or now known as Bruce Telecom; Wightman telecom; Xplornet; Telesat that I told you about earlier—it's just incredible the number of satellites and how they can connect around the world and are a leader in the world—EH!tel Networks; and HuronTel. Some of those, again, are shared with my colleague the Minister of Agriculture, the member for Huron–Bruce. But just to say that those companies are in the game. They have the ability. And I believe that what our government is trying to do is make it competitive so they can play against the big players. In some places, the big players may still be dominant, but if they are sub-contracting, that's still work, that's still employment, that's still jobs. So I see this as a huge opportunity, and all of us will do our job to make sure our players are at the table and can have that bidding opportunity. Bidding is a good thing when you're an auctioneer. Everyone should have the opportunity to bid and have the opportunity to play in any game we have.

As I said earlier, \$4 billion—I'm going to say it a number of times tonight: \$4 billion, with a B, to ensure all

communities in Ontario have access to reliable high-speed Internet. As this pandemic has taught us, access to broadband service is more important than ever and it will continue to play a role in the future. More people, as we know, are now working and learning from home, and I think that was, again, a huge success: how quickly the Minister of Education was able to transition us to allow things to happen remotely. For the safety of our children, we were able to do it remotely, and now, of course, we're back to school. We'll probably continue with a hybrid, where some areas of remote and rural northern Ontario, our First Nations communities—however we can help them to be an equal player is what we should be doing.

I shared earlier about SWIFT, the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology project, which has made a \$16-million investment in Bruce county and a \$17-million investment in Grey county. These projects continue to roll out across Bruce and Grey counties, connecting people, creating jobs, making our communities, our businesses, our schools, and our not-for-profits and our charities more sustainable. All of those agencies are going to have a positive impact as a result of this.

In Bruce county, the home of Wiarton Willie—without a shadow of a doubt, you've heard of him, I think, Mr. Speaker—we are soon going to pass a total of 5,225 homes with 247 kilometres of fibre.

My colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is quite a singer, Mr. Speaker; I don't know if you've had the pleasure to hear him. Maybe someday before he leaves he'll do another rendition in here. But I'm going to sound a bit like Stompin' Tom, because there's quite a few towns I'm going to roll on and do my auctioneer voice.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's Hank Snow.

Mr. Bill Walker: Was it Hank Snow?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Hank Snow, I've Been Everywhere.

Mr. Bill Walker: The I've Been Everywhere man is not Stompin' Tom. See, that's why I have the music guy here, and very well. Thank you for that amendment to my thought.

So, it's helping to bring broadband service to communities like: Sauble Beach, Lion's Head, Formosa, Colpoy's Bay, Wiarton, Vesta, Ellengowan, Pinkerton, Eden Grove, Cargill, Dunkeld, Chepstow, Otter Creek, Pearl Lake, Maple Hill, Malcolm, Tolmie, Skipness, Neyaashiinigmiing and Langside.

In Grey county, Mr. Speaker, SWIFT has passed or will pass 3,982 homes with 241 road kilometres of fibre. It is helping bring broadband services to communities like: Rockford, Chatsworth, Williamsford, Holland Centre, Dornoch, Habermehl, Crawford, Mulock, Allan Park, Vickers, Holstein, Varney, Orchardville, Maple Lane, Yeovil, Dromore, Tartan, Thirstle, Cruickshank, Springmount, Leith, Annan, Bognor and Hanover.

It's not a poetic thing, Mr. Speaker, but that's as close as I could get to your fine ability to speak.

Last year our government, in partnership, announced \$252 million to expand broadband services in south-western Ontario alone. This announcement included up to

\$43 million for local projects that could service up to 10,393 homes, again across my riding, in some of those that I haven't named yet: Sauble Beach South, Tobermory, Oliphant, Pike Bay, Red Bay, Miller Lake West, Oxenden, Shallow Lake, Kemble, Hillsdale, Feversham, Lisle, Stokes Bay, Big Bay, Hepworth—the holy Hepworth where I come from, the little village—Kiowana Beach, New Lowell, Anten Mills, Berkeley, Chippawa Hill, Priceville, Glencairn, Ivy, Kilsyth, Desboro, Baxter, Meaford, Walters Falls, Maxwell, Elmwood, Elmvale, Rocklyn, Aytton, Miller Lake East, Flesherton, Eugenia, Leith, Durham, Allenford, Chesley, Badjeros, Neustadt, Clavering, Markdale, Kimberley, Honeywood and Tara.

Mr. Speaker, it is truly, truly changing our communities. It is giving hope. It is giving the ability for people to know that they can play against anybody and compete equally with anyone else in the world. I'm so proud that we have stepped up, and we've negotiated with the federal government, like we did with the child care. We went to the federal government and said, "You have to be a partner in this." And we didn't, again there, take the first deal that came along, which the opposition thought we should just grab and snatch and go for the bauble; what we did is we used intelligence and strategy and conviction to say, "We want to make sure." On that note, we'll continue as a government to push the federal government to make sure things like our health care subsidies and transfer payments actually increase to where they should be so we have the ability to maximize this connectivity to give the best health care that we possibly can to the people we're given the privilege to serve.

It is just truly game-changing, Mr. Speaker, the ability that this is going to give us, for our small businesses, our large businesses. Every single part of your life, as we all know, is being impacted. You can now do things on your phone, Mr. Speaker, that, 10 years ago, we wouldn't have even dreamt of doing. You can be away at your cottage and stay in contact. You can be on the train and in contact. You can be driving up and down the highways—as we all do, particularly in rural and northern Ontario, the amount of kilometres we put on. It's allowing that innovation to impact our lives positively.

I keep coming back to the things and the developments and the innovation we've seen in health care: the ability for people to get that quality of care and service in a timely manner, because they can talk to that specialist around the world. We all know there's huge opportunity to continue to improve our health care system. But I believe this technology and the ability to be connected across the world is going to change lives continually.

Again, members across the aisle did ask—I believe someone suggested there was nothing in our notes about our First Nations communities. I do believe there was some money that has definitely been directed. The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. is investing \$2.57 million to support eight projects to support expansion of high-speed Internet in these communities. I apologize if I don't get the pronunciation properly here. One of the projects includes an investment in Mishkeegogamang

Ojibway First Nation's project that will increase access to high-speed Internet for the 600 residents living in the community. So, again, we are trying as much as we possibly can.

I go back, as I started off this speech, to saying if the members of the official opposition had actually held the Liberals to account and not allowed them to triple the debt—it's one of the biggest issues I've had in my 10 years here, the amount of debt that they tripled over the 15 years of their tenure, and all of that money, \$12 billion in interest, going to interest payments to a conglomerate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Every year.

Mr. Bill Walker: Every single year—it's exactly that. What could we have done with \$12 billion for Internet services in the north and our remote communities and for those less fortunate, Mr. Speaker? What could we have done for our health care system, Mr. Speaker? What could we have done for the long-term care? But we actually are now taking that baton again. We knew from sitting in opposition, sadly—and we held the government to account—where we were going to go. But just think of the money that would have been there for long-term care if they hadn't been able to triple that debt.

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I'm partly saying this, Mr. Speaker, even though I'm not going to be out on the hustings having to apply for a job. But that is the difference. We are a government that has built infrastructure: our roads, our bridges, subway systems down here, our health care systems. The money we've put into health care in my riding alone is incredible. The infrastructure that we've built: Markdale Hospital, which for 15 years the Liberals neglected to do. We have five new schools. We have three new daycares. We have hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure, roads, bridges. Now we have this connectivity that, again, is part and parcel of all that we've done.

Mr. Speaker, we have been saying yes, we have been saying we will, and to all of those out there, I think if you are fair, you will say there have been a lot of great things that have happened under these four years of our government to make sure that our communities are connected, they are innovative, they are efficient, and that we are building the capital infrastructure that is going to serve the people of Ontario for many, many, many years to come. The crowing glory is going to be this bill, this \$4-billion historic investment, connecting small towns, little towns, big towns, short towns, funny towns—anybody out there, Mr. Speaker? This is going to be a good day when they are all connected.

I really appreciate the opportunity. We are connected; we'll stay connected. Mr. Speaker, thank you for your indulgence.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for a bit of levity this afternoon using his auctioneer's voice. I would say, as my dear old dad would say, he must have been inoculated by a gramophone needle.

We have time for questions, and the member from Sudbury has one.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I told him personally, but I want to thank him for his service. He's not returning this year. We've had good conversations outside.

My question is straightforward. Sudbury is fortunate that all of Sudbury has high-speed. There are a couple of neighbourhoods that had high-speed in the old days, but that high-speed was one megabit and now they are struggling. So the three things we're looking for are, we want to make sure everyone is connected, and I think we're all aligned on that; we want to make sure that everyone has high-speed, and expandable high-speed, so that they're not stuck at one megabit 10 years from now; and we want to make sure it's affordable. What in this bill helps to ensure this is achievable? I'm not trying to trip anyone up; I'm asking for that advice so that we can let people know.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, and again, a pleasure to work with my colleague from Sudbury. I think what I can assure you is, again, most things that we're bringing to the table, of all of the things we do—again, we're known as the business party, so we bring that competitive, open, fair mindset of how we do that. That's why I said earlier in my speech that we're not doing all of one thing and only in one way. We are looking at it, whether it's satellite, whether it's wireless, whether it's actual fibre, and how do we do that. We want competitive bids so the most amount of people can actually get served across the province. We look at every single dollar not as a cost; we look at it as an investment. If you put the dollar in, what are you providing me at the other end?

Certainly, when I was a minister, when I talked earlier about natural gas, that's how I looked at it. How many people can be served? What's the collective good? It's not all just the numbers; it's what is that little community going to gain if we can get it to them, and how are they going to stay sustainable, how are they going to pay more taxes to make sure their community is the best that it ever can be? The key is competitiveness, and we'll continue to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has a question.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to say to my colleague, what a tremendous address this evening. You know, when it comes to connectivity, the guy's got it. He's connected to every single one of his communities and has been for 11 years, and has served them in such a tremendous way. And if we're talking about speed, we can deliver at different speeds, but when the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is delivering, he is delivering at high speed. So high-speed connectivity goes hand in hand with this member.

I just want to say to him what an honour it's been for me to sit beside you, and with you, for these—closer to 11 years, by the way. Don't undersell yourself. Closer to 11 years, and what a fantastic member you have been. Tonight is just another example. You're making sure that the people of your communities are always uppermost on your mind, and the service to them has been, as you say,

an honour to you, and they've been honoured to have you serve them. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I don't know if there was a question there, but if you'd like to respond, please go ahead.

Mr. Bill Walker: Right back to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: I've learned a lot from him sitting in this hallowed chamber and he's mentored many of us around. And he's always entertaining. He's certainly somebody who puts his heart and passion and conviction into whatever he does. But he has also held all of us to account and to our principles, and he's always been that person in caucus, regardless of whether there was a title or not a title, to make sure that we were here doing those exact right things. He taught us by example and led by example to make sure your home community is what you do first: You take care of people. And, yes, I may have a little bit of a gift of the Energizer Billy. I may get a lot of words in, maybe a few more in a minute and a half than other people may, but I can't sing like the member from Nipissing; although I tried a little bit there and I just probably embarrassed myself.

But at the end of the day, it is about passion, it is about energy, it is about high-speed connectivity in our communities, both as individuals, but embracing that technology that we're bringing to Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Now we'll have questions. The member from Brampton North.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member opposite for his speech. It's always enlightening to hear him talk about many issues, and of course this one here is very important, not just for the northern members, but everybody right across Ontario—Bill 93, talking about the broadband issue.

Now, I talked earlier about how in Brampton North and across Brampton, we really don't have a big concern or an issue with broadband. The majority of people actually have broadband. I think what is at issue here is also the transparency and procurement. People in the GTHA also are concerned about choice. There are large monopolies that are dealing in broadband. What I want to know from the government is how they will allow smaller service providers to enter the field, to provide the service, to provide the choice in northern Ontario and make sure that there are fewer—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You're out of time. Thank you.

We'll go to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to respond.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you again to the member from Brampton North. I know you've worked hard for your constituents there. I'll provide an answer. Just before I do, though, I think the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke was a little worried that I might have left the thought that he was leaving. But I know there are members across the aisle who want to make sure he does stay, and he is staying. I almost could put money on, with the numbers that he gets, that he will definitely be back after June 2.

To your question, again, it's like I said earlier: It's that competitiveness. It's making sure that when we write the scope of these things we are making sure—and I do that when I come from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, because we mostly have the small little guy who's going to be the sustainable entrepreneur in our area who's always going to be there. There's room for the big player, there's room for the small and there's room for the medium. Our job is to make sure that we keep it competitive, we give everybody an opportunity, and that's what this connectivity, again, is being able to compete with the world. So we bring that exact same mindset: Whether it's connectivity or natural gas, how to be competitive? What's the best bang for the people of Ontario?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Brantford–Brant.

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, through you, I would also like to echo how much I will miss the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. It's been truly a pleasure getting to know him and his leadership in the House, his advice and his kindness to all members, and especially to my daughter when she was a page just before last Christmas. She spoke very, very highly of you, and I really appreciate that.

I just wanted to ask the member, because he has been here longer than I have, and he got to witness some of the Liberal inaction on natural gas and on Internet. I kind of heard the insinuation a little bit from across the way this evening that it could be that we're doing nothing but making promises that we don't intend to keep on this. With the experience that the member has had here in the House, I was wondering if he could dig in a little bit more on what he's seen that's so different, beyond just the fact that we are putting \$4 billion into this, not just the \$500 million that the Liberals put forward.

Mr. Bill Walker: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member from Brantford–Brant, I echo it right back to you. You've been a great addition to the team. Your heart and soul is always in it. A special hello to your daughter. Of course, it was a pleasure to have her here as a page, as it is with all the pages. They are the future, and that's why we need to treat them the way we do: so that they want to aspire to be us in the future.

Your question is bang on. I'll give you one prime example of the difference. The Liberals that I sat across from and held to account, every time they brought out a budget, they went to deficit. They spent more money than they brought in in revenues. We continually tried to hold them to account, and they kept spending. But the Markdale Hospital, for 18 years on the books—they promised it three times just in the time I was in government, let alone the 10 years before that. The biggest difference: It's coming out of the ground right now. It's actually a new facility rising out of the ground in Meaford. And we have examples of that all across the province, whether it's Internet, broadband or infrastructure, like hospitals. If you drive around this province anywhere and look at the construction going on. That's the difference.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Oshawa has a question.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: The member has been talking about competitiveness, competition and that fair field, I would imagine. The reverse auction was an interesting thing, and as we heard from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, some of his local small and medium ISPs that he connected with didn't know about it. They were left out at the beginning because—I don't know—however it was advertised or not.

Every single person who was part of that process had to sign an NDA, so we won't actually know about that process. I worried that because there were so few map chunks, so to speak, the 93 lots, that some of the smaller guys couldn't even get into it. So assuming that many of them were left out because they might be too expensive or they couldn't get in the game, are you imagining that they will be able to indeed get in the game at some point and help to spend some of that \$4 billion and provide service to their neighbours in the small communities? Do you see that happening? I don't, and I'd love some reassurance.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm not doubting for a moment my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I'm not going to try to answer why some of his don't. I can tell you that many of our colleagues in rural Ontario have those small ones. I named a number of them in my riding that, again, are part of that process. They are part of it, so they knew about it. I did my job to make sure they knew about it. And who knows for what reasons—I'm not saying he didn't; all I'm saying is that all of ours that I know about, I haven't had anybody come to me in my riding saying, "I don't understand, and I don't know why."

My expectation that I said to them when it was all getting going—because there were questions certainly in my riding as well about the same thing, but we made sure we pushed through the agencies and the organizations.

In our case, we have SWIFT. We have a pretty large group. There's EORN. Maybe in northern Ontario they don't have the same type, and maybe that's why some of that communication didn't go as far as it could have. But what I will say to you is, we have tried in everything we've done through our procurement to make sure that they have the ability to truly be competitive, to have this, and connectivity with this project will allow more and more to be part of the game going forward.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to be able to stand in my place today and add some thoughts on the record on Bill 93, which is the Getting Ontario Connected Act, with a focus on broadband.

I am very pleased to serve Ontario as the official opposition critic for infrastructure, transportation and highways, and was glad to be able to sit in committee and hear from folks across the province. Frankly, there weren't too many voices at committee because this is not a particularly contentious bill. There was some fine-tuning in terms of

government amendments or whatnot, but really we're all on the same page about this particular bill.

I think where we should be having some important conversation is around the behind-the-scenes in how decisions are made about broadband and how we ensure that everybody we talk about in this House—in this room and across the province—will indeed have that access to broadband—and not just great quality broadband; I think we agree that that's important—but we would like people to be able to afford it.

That was something that I had sought at committee when we had the opportunity to speak directly to the ministers bringing forward this bill. We wanted that reassurance that Ontarians would indeed be able to afford the service. Whether they live in Oshawa, they live in Timiskaming, they live in Sudbury or they live in Brampton North, we want people to be able to afford it, and that's folks and families, businesses, students—

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Speaker, the heckles aren't appropriate. In fact, that heckle was—I thought that heckle was quite rude.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I didn't hear the heckle, but I will suggest by your thought that I will remind members to always use parliamentary language, and you shouldn't really be heckling in the first place. So I just remind everyone to stay above the bar.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Perhaps some of them would rather not be the representatives for Oshawa, and that's just fine. I am super thrilled to be the representative for Oshawa, but that's not what I'm here to discuss, although another time we could do that.

Let's talk about broadband, as I was. This government has been talking a lot about broadband, and I think we all have a pretty clear and strong connection to it. Whether we're talking about students, whether we're talking about people telecommuting or all of their Zoom meetings and whatnot, we have been living it, and some people have been extremely challenged to access it, and some have not been able to at all. Actually, frankly, Speaker, I wonder what it has looked like for them in many of our communities, whether it's that they have to go to the library or they're just left out of that Zoom circuit. Some of our colleagues on different Zoom calls have had to call in rather than be on screen.

Speaker, the government is talking a lot about its investment in broadband, and I will say that \$4 billion—with a "b," as we've heard it—is a lot of money. But I'm going to be cynical, because I can't help it, because this is a government that has left money earmarked for broadband unspent in the past few budgets. We have heard about how they are planning to roll that out after the work is done; they'll pay for it after the fact. I'm not going to debate that. That's their plan. But let's make sure that the money is spent and let's make sure that the plan is sound so that people get what they need, because \$4 billion is a solid commitment. That is a truckload of money and it, frankly, should be enough to ensure every house and

business and farm and family has access to quality Internet.

I am concerned, though, that the Ontario Connects procurement program might have been structured in a way that did shut out small and medium-sized Internet service providers. That's something that we have talked about, Speaker, when you were making your remarks, and you did list a lot of your local smaller and medium-sized Internet service providers. That's great. We want them to be able to connect their neighbours because, as we have seen across the province—whether we're talking about natural gas or whatnot—the big service providers don't provide service to the last-milers.

The member from Nickel Belt is here. I'm sure that she's going to be able to speak at some point about the fact that the folks at the end of the line, the last-milers—there's no profit there to be made. The big companies don't make money from them and they aren't providing the service, whether it is natural gas or, in this case, perhaps, broadband. Internet service providers will be the ones to hook folks up across communities. The big ones, the big players like Bell and Rogers, have a lot of capacity, but rural Ontario isn't exactly where they prefer to do business.

We've talked about the lots, and I'd like to explain what that is, Speaker. The government divvied up the provincial map into lots or, more technically, the service area maps. Large lots and large mapping are going to make sure that smaller ISPs can't or couldn't participate. If these lots are bigger than about \$10 million or \$20 million—and that's sort of a number that I had heard when we were talking with folks—that would be beyond the capacity of a small ISP. Think about a small ISP and whether or not they even have the money to bid on a lot that is so massive, whether they have what they need to service that area. But we were asking about what minimum financial capacity ISPs would have to demonstrate to be eligible to bid.

I had written a letter, Speaker, to Michael Lindsay, the president and CEO of Infrastructure Ontario, and this was back in October that we were curious about this. We wanted to make sure that we had the information for folks. We wanted to know what would be the approximate dollar value for each of the lots that represent those geographical broadband expansion areas. Were they going to be outside of the capacity, beyond the capacity of the small ISPs? What minimum financial capacity would they have to be able to demonstrate to even be deemed eligible to bid? For example, was there a minimum access to a prescribed line of credit or minimum lines of credit or liability insurance or surety bonds or whatever else was needed to make sure that they could even get in on this?

And then another question that I had for Infrastructure Ontario was: How was Infrastructure Ontario going to ensure that rural broadband consumers won't eventually be exposed to unaffordable rate increases by monopolistic ISPs, like the unaffordable rate increases that rural electricity consumers have been exposed to? Those are some of the questions that I had asked Infrastructure Ontario. I don't have those answers.

In fact, when I posed some of those and more to the minister at committee, she said the same thing that Infrastructure Ontario said, which was that that information is—you can't have it. Those weren't her words, but the NDA, the non-disclosure agreement, which may be standard operating procedure for Infrastructure Ontario, but not outside in the broader infrastructure world—there's different accountability.

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I would wonder whose interests are protected when every ISP seeking to do business with the government knows the details of this procurement process, but the public doesn't. How on earth can the public be assured that this procurement process will serve the interests of rural broadband consumers and not the interests of large ISPs? So that policy of non-disclosure I see as problematic, but then, I'm here to serve the public, so that should be my position. I wish that it were the government's. During this RFQ process, I'm worried that a whole swath of ISPs—the small ones, the local ones—may have been excluded, and we won't know, because they signed NDAs.

The reverse auction has been concluded, is my understanding. The Minister of Infrastructure had told us at committee that she will be reviewing the information, making a report to the Legislature, all of that. But, again, we won't know who was left out at that stage. So whoever made it through that qualification portal, whoever made it into the next round of the game, that remains to be seen. I hope that I've been sounding an alarm for no reason. I hope that 93 lots are sufficient to allow some of the local folks to get in the game. But I would imagine that 400 or 500 lots would have been more appropriate sizes for them, based on what we were hearing from some of the folks who have been delivering Internet to local communities.

And they want to, eh? The small and medium-sized ISPs want to do business in their communities. They like their neighbours. They know their neighbours. They want their community to do well. That's not to say that Bell and Rogers don't want people to do well, but there isn't the money in it for them.

We keep having this conversation in this room. I stood and gave, as I recall, a barn-burner—maybe not—but an hour-long speech on natural gas back in the day, and I remember that we were really trying to drive home hard to this government that they needed to say the words “rural,” “northern,” “Indigenous communities,” to put it in the bill, to make sure that it was, indeed, a priority, and it wasn't put in. While we heard the former Minister of Energy speak with passion and knowledge about the file and about the work that he did—and I give him full credit for that work—we still have folks at the end of the line who don't have natural gas, and I don't think they're going to.

And if the member from Nickel Belt—who just put up her hand—was suggesting that she—does the member, in Nickel Belt, yet have natural gas?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Nope. But I can see the line.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, she says, but she can see the line. This is part of the problem: She can see the line, but can't tap in, because there's no money in that for the

big boys, right? If the government of the day—this one is currently of the day—isn't going to make it a priority and ensure that they get that service, they're not going to.

Here we are with broadband, and I'm going to have the same conversation. I had it with the minister and I asked about these fibre optic trunk lines: They are not the natural gas pipelines, okay? But picture basically the same concept. You've got a fibre optic trunk line that the big boys are not going to invite the smaller guys to tap into. It's not in their best interest. But without that access, you're not going to have that local connection. I had asked, would this government, would this minister figure out a way to make that happen? Will the province ensure smaller ISPs can access the trunk lines at major inter-sections, make them point-of-interconnection? And we didn't get an answer to that, whether because we ran out of time or there was no answer at that time. The question remains. I hope that it will become a priority.

The folks at SWIFT or EORN that we hold up as examples of doing good work in terms of connecting communities—and they have, but they also have done a lot of leg work and a lot of local work to hammer out those contracts, those agreements with the small Internet service providers—and sometimes with the big ones. It's not only the little guys, but it is taking the time and figuring out the right fit, the best fit for communities. I forget if it was 80% of the contracts with SWIFT, or 81%, went to small and medium providers and then the others went to the big ones. But that's a lot of work. I'm not meaning to disrespect Infrastructure Ontario, but they do tend to deal in bulk. They do tend to deal with the big players. They're working on massive projects across the province. I would like some reassurance that they are willing to do that work with the smaller guys.

The folks at the ministry and the folks at Infrastructure Ontario have been hearing a lot from my office, hearing a lot from the NDP. We had put in an FOI seeking information about the service area maps and everything. I think there were 93 records that we could have had, except that we couldn't because—well, I'm going to paraphrase, but basically, state secrets, commercially sensitive or what have you. And it's frustrating, because again, we were wanting to make sure that everything was accountable. We don't see that. We'll never know. But I hope that everyone gets the service that they deserve.

We did get a few submissions at committee. One of them was from a gentleman named Charles Taylor. While he didn't come in person before the committee, he had made a written submission, and I'm going to read from his submission into the record.

“To the committee,

“I work remotely for a company in Montreal, but currently reside in Toronto. I would like to move back to Halliburton to be closer to my family, but am not able to access Internet connectivity sufficient for my working needs there. The government's current plan would not change that fact, as it sets standards which are too low. Furthermore, it is likely to reward the shareholders of incumbent telecoms while failing to deliver connectivity Ontarians need.

“I urge the committee to include a requirement of 1000” megabits per second “symmetrical with no data cap for any project. 100” megabits per second “symmetrical is the minimum requirement for many types of remote work today, and this requirement is sure to grow in the future. Any buildout except fibre will be squandering a generational opportunity to connect rural and remote communities.

“The incumbent telecoms have failed to effectively deliver service to rural and remote communities. Where it is available, the incumbents provide poor service at extremely high rates. Continuing to reward the incumbents ensures that rural Ontarians will pay exorbitant rates for poor service on into the future....

“Please—do not relegate rural communities to the expense, poor-quality connectivity currently envisioned by the government's plan.”

Speaker, the technical stuff I've been learning, as are most Ontarians, whether we're talking about the 50/10 or 1 gigabit per second symmetrical or all of these things—everybody remembers—well, some of us remember dial-up. I remember dial-up. I feel like the wireless of today is sort of the dial-up of tomorrow. I think not only is this 50/10 an increasingly obsolete standard, the Ontario Connects RFP document clearly shows that rural Ontario will receive one of two different standards as part of the broadband expansion program. So this is what the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane was talking about: The lucky ones will have wired technology, which has more capacity, is faster, is higher-quality. They're going to have the wired technology, which the RFP document defines as 1 gigabit per second down, 100 up. The unlucky ones will get slower and less reliable wireless technology, which the RFP defines as 50/10, and Infrastructure Ontario has refused to disclose which communities will get what standard. That was something we heard at committee. We had folks from AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, there. They're looking forward to having the information to figure out who are the haves and who are the kind-of-haves—who gets the wired, who gets the wireless. The minister kept saying, “Oh, it's the federal standards, the 50/10. We don't set the standards.” Well, they had the opportunity to put that in, setting a higher standard. That's the federal minimum, but they could have done something different.

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But again, AMO was also wondering about the cost, and that was where I started before. We talk about the exorbitant cost of electricity for folks, and if we are not ensuring that it is affordable and accessible and good quality, we are not doing our jobs. So we can pat ourselves on the back and say \$4 billion is a massive number—yes, it is—and we can say every home is going to have Internet—I hope so—but I hope that it's the high-quality Internet.

This is technical stuff, but when people are applauding this and anticipating this, we don't want them not only to be disappointed, but we don't want them to be left out. We don't want these farms and businesses and students and

just folks left behind when we have an opportunity to get ahead. We want to future-proof, and the future is fibre.

Speaker, all of that to say, the people of Ontario are eventually going to get to know after all of the deals are done, it's too late for changes, and I hope things will work out. Maybe they will, or maybe this government will do to rural broadband what previous government did to rural hydro, which is sticking them with skyrocketing costs and unreliable service. We've had to fight pretty hard for transparency. We haven't won that fight. But I'm looking forward to broadband. We just really hope that it's for everyone and it's the best it can be, and I would challenge this government to be the best that they can be as well and maybe be forthcoming with some of that information, or allay some of my fears today. That would be great, too.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Perth–Wellington has a question.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thanks, Speaker. I had to look around to see if anybody else was standing up here.

I want to thank the member from Oshawa for her comments. I, too, wish we had a system that you could just plug in and everything turns on, but we haven't got that. This is a huge, huge province. You can't plow through stones and you can't do a lot of things in this province to get cable here and cable there. That's why we've invested in the satellite technology, and I hope it's as good as it can be.

Also, I would like to tell the member that the rates are set by the federal government, so we have to look their way as far as rates go, and I hope they will be competitive. We did have a number of smaller providers in our community ask about getting involved with this thing, and they could have pooled their resources. I wonder if the member will vote for this bill and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You'll have to guess at the question, because he's run out of time to pose it. I'll go back to the member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I was just hearing the end of it there and he wants to know if I'm going to support this bill. We have said all along that we're supporting this bill. There's nothing controversial about this bill. This bill is kind of moving this forward.

What is controversial is the secrecy. It has been everything that's been happening behind the NDAs, and that's disappointing. Earlier the member had sort of suggested that perhaps we're not doing our job or whatever if we have local ISPs who didn't know about it. Well, are they going to be able at any point, whether they knew about it or they didn't qualify—is there going to be an opportunity for them to get involved? I don't know.

So, yes, we support the bill, but we support our local ISPs and our neighbours as well, and we want to keep rooting for them, frankly.

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

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member from Oshawa for her speech. You talked a lot about affordability. You talked a lot about transparency in the procurement process. That is key. We still are not getting the

answers from the government, as you mentioned. One of the big concerns, of course, is the smaller Internet service providers. We need to ensure that they are able to get into the game, and unfortunately, with this bill there is nothing in there that allows them to get into the game. It's still allowing for the larger providers, as you mentioned, to stay into the game.

So what is the concern if the small Internet service providers are not in the game? What sort of problems do you see in the future, not just in rural Ontario, but even right across the GTHA? What sort of concerns—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you very much. Back to the member from Oshawa to reply.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: There's really not much in this bill that isn't kind of technical and has to happen. It's the parts outside of this bill with the process, that reverse auction. If they miss their window, will there be another opportunity? I don't know. I look forward to finding out what that will look like, because if it's just the medium and big players that can get in, how will we get the end-of-the-line folks? The rural communities: How will we actually ensure that they get that service? I don't know.

Frankly, I'm sure that all of the government members, as well as the members on this side of the House, want their neighbours connected. Nobody is like, "Ooh, I know a community that I don't want to have service." I'm not suggesting there's any nefarious intent here, but I want to make sure we don't leave people out. So I will look forward to the government sharing that with us: how we ensure that the end-of-the-line folks get it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Peterborough–Kawartha has a question.

Mr. Dave Smith: I have been in the computer industry for a very long time. I wrote software for 22 years prior to getting elected. I go back to ARCnet and token ring. When wireless technology was first introduced, I think it was at two megabits per second. We thought that that was world-changing.

The way that this is being rolled out right now, we're asking for the top-level technology. Obviously, we want to do as much fibre optic as possible, but to get to that last mile we are looking at wireless technologies. Does the member agree that if the wireless technology that exists today is the fastest wireless technology that we have available to us, that's what we need to be getting out to that last mile where we're not able to get fibre optic?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I wish we had a little more time, because I want to get into the nerd weeds here. I'm not calling you a nerd, but I want to get into the nitty-gritty. I have had a chance to visit some folks—actually, some of my colleagues—up north, and their WiFi isn't a thing. Like, you don't have WiFi. So if we're talking about they can't have fibre, am I willing to accept wireless and WiFi? No. No, I would not, if it means what it means, currently, where you have to go and stand up on the hill by the bait shop and maybe you get one bar. That is not going to cut it. I can't run my business, my farm or my schooling there.

I don't know what I don't understand in this. There obviously is something. So I would love the government

to be clear to the folks in the north and the rural communities: Is that going to be enough to cut it? Am I mistaken when I say “WiFi” or are we talking about something different? There’s a lot of granite. There’s a lot of rock. There’s a lot of stuff that the signal has to get through. So reassure me. That would be great.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you again to the member for Oshawa for her debate.

One of the things she said that stood out to me: “The wireless of today is the dial-up of tomorrow.” It reminded me of the 1990s when we were on baud modems, in 1996, or whatever you had. I remember being super excited that Diamond Multimedia was bringing out the Shotgun modem. You could plug in two phone lines and it would be two 56K modems. I could not believe how lucky people were who were going to spend five hundred bucks for this; they were going to have high-speed Internet.

I just wanted to let her know—I’m wondering, for the member from Oshawa, what does it mean for the members of your community if we get the technology wrong, we invest a ton of money into this and we find out that we’re sitting around with these 56K modems of their day, today, five years from now, 10 years from now?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I love the idea of planning ahead. We’ve learned some stuff along the way. When we’re cutting into the ground, it’s great to lay dark cable when we’re doing infrastructure projects, and that sort of planning ahead. Some communities have; others haven’t. Fibre is future-proof, at least with the technologies that we’re aware of today. I don’t know what exactly is going to be outdated or how long we have, but where we can, let’s do our best. Let’s put in the best quality that we can to ensure that the service is the best quality.

In Oshawa, we have a local library branch that used to have to shut off its WiFi after whatever time at night because they realized that was the corner where all the kids would go because it was the only place that they could get WiFi because their families couldn’t afford it. It wasn’t safe for them to be congregating all through the night.

We have to also make sure it’s affordable. We want quality, but we want to make sure that it’s affordable. Those assurances would also be welcome.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Carleton has a question.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: In northern Ontario, we are investing \$10.9 million to support six broadband infrastructure projects in the north that will directly enable high-speed Internet for over 7,000 homes and businesses in several municipalities and First Nations communities. We also have a commitment of \$63.3 million over five years to the Next Generation Network Program to support the launch of 11 projects, which includes Carling township, Iron Bridge, Temagami and Kenora.

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My question to the member is: Will she support the government on this bill to improve broadband and connectivity in rural and northern Ontario?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I love the question packages—they’re fun.

As I said, yes, we’re going to support this bill. I generally don’t support this government, but some of the conversations we’ve been having in here sound good. We do want the north and we do want the rural communities to get that service.

What I have been raising today are good questions and concerns and I wish we had more time, and I wish we had folks in this room who were in a position to reassure me or to explain to me where perhaps I’m mistaken or what have you. But I haven’t had that. I didn’t have that at committee, and I haven’t had that in this space.

We support people having access to quality and affordable Internet. In a few years, I want people to say, “Hey, Jen, you were wrong. We all got it, and it’s amazing.” So let’s work towards that. Prove me wrong. I would support that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? The retiring member—and I don’t mean retiring; I mean the laid back, never controversial member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, nothing is ever certain until the writ drops, sir. You never know. I love to keep them guessing.

The other thing I want to keep you guessing on—just because you may wonder about that—is that unlike Al Gore, I do not claim to have invented the Internet. I do not claim and have never claimed to have invented the Internet, but we are going to talk a little bit about the Internet tonight.

But I find it interesting. To the member for Oshawa: She’s saying she loves these question things or whatever. I have a bit of a question in my own mind about what’s going on here, because, you see, the people on the other side already voted against Bill 111 on second reading. They stood and voted against it, but then they didn’t want to speak to it today on third reading. Now we go to a bill that the House leader—or the chief whip, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane—says that they’re going to support, but then they’re talking to it. So all we have to do is get them talking and we’ve got it made. It just doesn’t seem that there’s—there’s a bit of a contradiction in terms there: “We’re not going to vote for that gas tax thing, but we don’t want to talk about it. And now we’re going to support this broadband bill, but we’re going to talk about it.”

But what are they talking about? They’re talking about some science fiction thoughts about in the future—“Well, it might not do this or it might not do that.” I didn’t realize this was the combination of the new St. James version of the Bible and War and Peace altogether. It’s got all the answers in it, and the world is settled: This bill, and apparently there’s no more questions in the world; it’s all done.

Well, I have to say to the folks on the other side, you’ve got to come up with something better than that. Why don’t you actually look at the bill and tell us what’s wrong with the bill. I know when I was on the other side, we actually

took a look at it. We picked up the bill; we got a copy of the bill—and they're on the table right there, I just want to point out. Right at the Clerks' table, they've got them laid out for you there. We would pick up a copy of the bill, we'd read it over and we'd say, "Whoa, whoa. Wait a minute," or as my mother-in-law would say, "Not so fast, not so fast." We'd be saying, "Okay, there's a problem here, and we're not sure that this is a good thing in this bill," which is your right to do as the opposition. But here we've got this bill, and they haven't—I didn't even see anybody pick it up off the table. They may have. They may be using it as a coaster or something, I don't know. Maybe they're writing some notes on it. But they're not taking the bill itself and saying, "We've looked in this bill, and I want to say to the government members on the other side that we have a problem. Houston, we have a problem. There's a problem with this bill." But they can't find problems in the bill so they're going to conjure up some scary notion about what it might not do five years down the road or something. A lot can change in five years. A lot can change in a week.

I remember—as I say, I didn't invent the Internet. There's probably some people who are wondering: "Oh, we thought he did." But no. That's a fact. I didn't invent the Internet, but I was around when it was invented, and I remember the first time Internet came to Barry's Bay—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Billy likes that. "Barry's Bay."

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Did you have a parade?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh, we didn't have a parade.

I remember the first providers. It was Dave and Diana Schulist, and their Internet service provider was mvigs.net. They came over to explain it to me one day and thought I should have it, and I thought how amazing this was because somebody could send me some words, and I didn't have to have—I thought a fax machine was pretty impressive, and apparently they've been around for over 100 years. Somebody could send me some words and I could print them off. I thought, "Wow, this is great." That's what you could basically do with the download speeds at the time was you could get some written messages, and the graphics—talk about the improvements. The graphics we are able to transmit over those bands today are absolutely amazing, and the speed at which we can do them.

Now, I have to tell you that at my place in Barry's Bay, Billy, it's still a little sketchy, because it's not fibre optic at my house. When I'd be doing these Zoom meetings during the pandemic—a lot of them we were doing from home—if my wife would get a call from her mother, for example, while I was on the Zoom meeting, if she picked up the phone—and the House leader would know if I was on a caucus meeting and all of a sudden I'm gone if Vicky picked up the phone—and we always forgot. She picks up the phone and there goes my Zoom meeting. At least, I'd have to reconnect and everything. What we had to do, and still have to do, is, if I'm going to go on a meeting, I just say, "Hey, Vic, just take the phone off the hook and leave it off the hook. Besides, I'm not worried if I get a call from

Paul, so just leave the phone off the hook while I'm on this meeting." That's how we've been able to manage that.

When the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane was talking about, or somebody else was talking about, well, only two people in the house could be on the Internet at the same time, or one person or whatever the case may be, I understand exactly what he's talking about. Maybe not exactly, because it's just my wife and I who are there most of the time. Our kids are grown up and gone. But if the grandkids are over, we might have that issue. So I understand the lack of capacity that can be the problem—the lack of bandwidth, I guess they call it. So I'm one of those people who this bill is aimed at, improving the lifestyle and the ability to work and play. I'm one of those people, and a lot of people just like me in Renfrew county and Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

When the Minister of Infrastructure—it began with Minister Scott, and Minister Surma has taken the bull by the horns on this one as well. When they're talking about the kind of investments that we're looking at—and I know the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane said, "Well, you haven't paid out the money." We were talking about milk. You milk the cows every day, but it does take a while to build infrastructure, so that milk that he gets paid—as he said, he used to get paid twice a month. Well, we're not paying twice a month for projects that might take a year or two to actually finish and complete. It's just a total red herring what they're talking about, about money not being spent.

The commitment we've made is the largest commitment to broadband expansion in the history of the country. You think about it: not just Ontario, the country. We're investing more money as a provincial government than Canada is in the rest of the country. That's how committed we are to making this happen, because, just like I'm talking about, if we're going to build the economy—and that's what we're doing here in Ontario, Speaker: We are building Ontario. But if you're going to build—

Interjections.

2010

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, thank you, thank you. Do that again. I really appreciate that. I want to make sure you're all listening.

If we're going to build Ontario, we have to make sure that Ontarians have the tools in order to succeed. One of the most important tools today in this digital age—a hundred years ago, nobody would have thought of these things, of course; but today, if you can't get connected, you're not in the ball game. If you can't get connected, you can't get into the ball game—not just in it, you can't get into it, Speaker.

We've taken probably one of the most important issues of the day, because we've recognized—as my friend from Brampton North talked about, most people in Brampton have high-speed Internet. It's not an issue for them. Most people in Toronto or other cities—Ottawa, London—have that. But what about the rest of us who have been left behind by the previous government, left behind so that we can't fully participate in the digital world? Well, our

Minister Surma and our Premier have said, “That’s not good enough. That’s not good enough.”

As a province, as a government, we owe it to everyone to give them a fighting chance, to give them a chance to compete, as my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound said, in his wonderful speech earlier—and he named more communities than, as he said, Hank Snow did in his song, *I’ve Been Everywhere*. He did it at high speed, too; I can tell you that, Speaker—no question about that.

But what he has seen and what he continues to see is that there are people in his riding, just like there are in mine and the ridings all across the north and every rural riding—I know my friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka sees it every day. My friend from Perth–Wellington: He’s got to see it there as well, where there are people who just don’t feel like they can completely engage in today’s digital economy because they don’t have those tools. Again, I say tools. You can’t fix the car if you don’t have a tool kit. You can’t build a house if you don’t have the tools. Well, you can’t participate in today’s digital economy if you don’t have the tools.

We’ve seen this coming. The pandemic identified and exacerbated and just pointed out, as the saying goes, as my dad would say, in boxcar letters, that we have a problem. And we’re going to fix it.

To my friends on the other side, it’s not something that you—it’s not Chia Internet, where you pour water on it, and there goes the fibre optics all across the province; it’s not a Chia Pet. This is a massive commitment. I already see the fibre optic cable being laid in my riding in preparation for when the service providers are prepared to bring in the gizmos or whatever. As you know, Speaker, I’m not an expert. Don’t ask me to hook you up to the Internet; you’d be lucky if I can turn it on when you do get it. But we’re doing all of those things. That preparatory work has to be done. That fibre optic cable has to be strung down through the ground and on the wires, and we’re using hydro poles for other transmissions. We’re going to tie in with Telesat for the low-orbiting satellites. It’s all hands on deck.

We realize this is not something where one size fits all and one provider can provide it all. We’re bringing in all the players. The big ones, the small ones: We’re bringing them all in. The local ones, the national ones: We’re bringing them all in—because this is a full-court press—to make sure.

You think about it: We are almost in the middle of 2022, and before 2025 is out, before the big ball in Times Square comes down on New Year’s Day 2026, no matter who you are, no matter where you are in this great province, you’ll have access to high-speed Internet, with guaranteed download and upload speeds—guaranteed. That is our commitment. So before the next, next election—which, presumably, would likely be in 2026—we might even be having a whole new way of advertising and campaigning, because everybody in the province is going to have a new way, a good way, the same way of getting the message across and receiving that message. Speaker, it is so exciting.

Let me talk a little bit more about home, not my home—I’ve talked enough about my home—but home: my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. Some of you have been there—the lucky ones, of course. Some of you have not. I hope you get a chance to visit. You’ll see some of the most beautiful parts of this country—well, I say to the Speaker, he knows because he worked there. I suspect part of the reason you’re retiring is because you want to move back there, for two reasons: because it’s so beautiful, and you probably want to work on my campaigns.

But what a beautiful, beautiful area. The lakes, they’re clean, good Canadian Shield lakes; beautiful vistas of hills and valleys; and some of the most—and most of the most—wonderful people in the world that have come from all across the world in the last couple of centuries. Why wouldn’t they have the same access to be able to work and play in the digital world that everybody else has?

It doesn’t matter whether you’re in Quadeville or Palmer Rapids or Whitney or Madawaska or Wilno. It doesn’t matter. Westmeath, La Passe—it doesn’t matter where you live, you’ve got to have access to that Internet, and that’s what we’re so committed to.

That’s why this bill—which, I understand and I hear that the folks on the other side are going to support it. Well, I am glad to hear that. Really, I am glad to hear it. But you wouldn’t dare vote against it, right? What kind of a message would you be sending to the people in rural and northern Ontario if you voted against it?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Like voting against the gas tax.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes. I’m glad that you mentioned that, sir. That’s why I’m so confused how, on the one hand, we’ve got a bill that is great for the people of Ontario—it may not be the greatest thing since sliced bread, but it’s sure getting up there because, I’ll tell you, there’s nothing more important today in the world of business than being able to connect—but then on the other hand, the opposition has indicated they’re going to vote against relief for the people.

Let’s just talk about some of the things we’ve done: tax relief, fee relief, taking away the burden, the financial burden of having to pay for a licence plate sticker. And I get it. I understand people who don’t own vehicles and ride public transit, who we—by the way, we’re making the biggest investments in public transit in the history of the country as well.

There seems to be an ongoing theme here, Speaker. This reminds me—and I was pretty young in 1959, when Leslie Frost was elected Premier. But it reminds me of those times, because my dad certainly talked about it. I had an opportunity to speak to an old friend a couple of weeks ago, Del O’Brien, and he talked about how it reminds him of the 1950s and Leslie Frost when he said, “We’re going to build Ontario,” and that’s what we’re doing here, Speaker. As Yogi would say, “It’s déjà vu all over again,” all of these announcements that are being made.

Oh, and I think I heard the member from Oshawa use the word “cynical.” I don’t think I heard it; I know I heard it. I’m not being cynical when I say that. But the cynicism we hear from the members on the opposite side, it’s just

their way of saying, “God, I wish I’d have thought of it. I wish we were doing it. I wish somebody was doing it, but not those people on that government side.”

But, you see, our job here is to go out there, talk to the people, find out what’s right, find out what’s not right and figure out what we can do to make their lives better. Otherwise, we shouldn’t be here at all. None of us should be. Each and every one of us when we come here, we should come with the goal in mind that we are going to improve the lives of the people we represent, be that local or be that provincial. That is our job.

2020

What is going on here with this government—and you have to understand, Speaker, that so many of the things that we wanted to do were sidetracked by a worldwide pandemic. Can you imagine the progress that would have already been made without COVID-19? Well, we’re going to make sure the people of Ontario understand, and I believe they do, that even in spite of all this, we didn’t stop working. We never lost sight of the goal. We made sure that when four years are up, the people will look on these four years and say, “Man, oh, man, how did they get all that done?”

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Sudbury has a question.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member opposite. It was confusing in the beginning because he said, “I can’t understand why they’re asking questions.” We’re asking questions because we want to make sure you get it right. The member opposite said, “I don’t have fibre; it’s a bit sketchy,” and he talked about the Liberals’ failures to bring in broadband Internet effectively, and that’s the story we hear in all of our ridings across northern Ontario, in rural areas exactly like the member opposite’s.

The questions we’re asking, Speaker, are to provide the legislation with good decision-making. What we’re asking you is how do we ensure that it’s quality Internet, how do we ensure it’s expandable Internet that keeps up with the times and how do we ensure it’s affordable? Simple questions.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Sudbury for the question—o ye of little faith.

Speaker, as we know, bills are not fully prescriptive. They’re a blueprint for the action plan. This bill will empower us to do the kinds of things that will be met and they’re addressed in regulation so that we can actually deliver the success and the results that the bill lays out in a general way. It sets the legal terms of how we’re going to do it.

The one thing that the people of Ontario can count on—and I say to the member of Sudbury, which you don’t have to worry about so much right in town, but all around you, you do—is that our commitment to broadband across the province by 2025 is ironclad.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Perth–Wellington has a question.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: There’s a company in my town of Listowel that puts in robotic milkers. I was there last fall, and they already had over 200 ordered for this year

alone. That’s how many robots that they have to put in. Now, if you take that number and multiply it by the number of cows and milk you’re supposed to look after, that’s 10,000 to 12,000 cows that those people are going to look after, for just that one company. So you can imagine the need for broadband that they need to keep those things going for record-keeping and whatever else. But there are parts of my community that don’t have that. They can’t put those barns up. They can’t put those robots in because they don’t have the broadband there to run those machines.

I wonder if the member could talk about what it means to farmers and businessmen in our rural areas to have reliable Internet.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to say that you can count on our commitment to keep things “moo”-ving right along in your community just like all others. I know the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane was talking about robotic milkers or other kinds of milkers. I’ve never milked a cow in my life, I’ve got to be honest with you. I certainly enjoyed the end product. When I was a teenager I used to drink about a gallon of milk a day; no kidding, about a gallon of milk a day.

People sometimes think of farms as being these last-century kinds of operations. They’re some of the most modern operations in the world today, and they have to be, because if you want to compete, you’d better be at the front of the parade. Our farmers are among the best, and we’re going to make sure that every farm that doesn’t have it today will have it by the time this bill is finished. They’re going to have it too—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. I’m sure we have other questions.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I want to thank the member opposite for his eloquent speech on this bill, as always. We mentioned we’re going to support this bill, and that’s not the question. There are some questions that we need answered within the bill.

I think with the pandemic, we saw just how important it was to have broadband. Students in rural Ontario weren’t able to access their studies. Contacting your doctor—you weren’t going into the doctor’s office; you were seeing him on Zoom or talking to him on the phone. Even here at the Legislature, dealing with our constituents—talking to them on Zoom, as well as other ways, instead of being in person because of COVID-19.

So with all that being said, Mr. Speaker, I guess this is a two-part question for the member—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Get one of them out.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Okay. It’s a one-and-a-half-part question for the member: Do you feel it is important to have broadband designated as an essential service, and will you put that in the bill?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I thank the member for Brampton North for his question, and I appreciate the work he’s been doing for his constituents as well. I realize that he doesn’t have a broadband issue in his riding, but there are challenges, for example, that I don’t have as a rural member as well.

Let me just say once again, the bill lays out the plan for the best connectivity plan anywhere in the country, and we're backing it with the largest investment anywhere in the country. We are engaging all players. Our commitment is to have Internet in every home by the end of 2025.

In this day and age, every home doesn't even have a telephone or a cellphone, and every home doesn't even have hydro yet today. But we're making this commitment that it will be available to every home. I don't know how more broad we could put it—

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

The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thanks to the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for his presentation. He talked about the importance of improving the lives of his constituents, and I wonder if he might talk about this bill being passed and being implemented, what a difference it's going to make to the lives of people in Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka for his question and also for his over 20 years of service in this Legislature. I hope I get a chance to speak more about that before the end of this session because he's been a mentor to me and a friend all those years as well.

Like I said, it's game-changing; it's life-changing. When I talk to people on the street, that is one of the most number-one issues on their mind: How can we get connected here in Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke? How can we ensure that we can get connected?

It started in my riding on the first day of the campaign in 2018 when the Premier made that amazing commitment, which has been met with an over \$300-million investment between all of the partners, to close the cellphone gap. That was one of the plans, and now we're talking about not only the cellphone gap but Internet connectivity to everyone.

Listen, for me, my wife and her mother will be able to speak while I'm on a Zoom meeting. Like, what better world than that?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Nickel Belt has a question.

2030

M^{me} France Gélinas: I was interested—when the member talks about engaging all players to be in the Internet business, does he also see a role for government to play a role in areas of the province where it doesn't matter how much money you give companies, they will never agree to set up shop in areas where there is no money to be made? Does he see a role for the government to play to make sure that every single house has access to the Internet, that every single outfitter in my riding has access to the Internet? Does he see a role for the government to play in order for the words that he just spoke to be true?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the member from Nickel Belt for the question. I think the bill speaks for itself, and our commitment speaks for itself. It is Internet service, guaranteed upload and download speeds, to every home

and every business by the end of 2025. It doesn't say some of the homes or just the ones so-and-so likes or just the ones that are in this whole locale or this area; it says every home by the end of 2025 will have access to high-speed Internet. I don't know how we could be more clear than that. That is the guarantee: By the end of 2025—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'll talk to you later.

By the end of 2025, every home, every business, everyone—does that include all the people? Everyone: I think it means “everybody,” and that's our commitment.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: We have heard from many speakers as to how important it is for all of us, no matter where we live in this beautiful province, to have access to high-speed Internet. I don't have access to high-speed Internet where I live. I would say about 80% of the riding that I serve does not have access to high-speed Internet, so this is a question that we look into. I can tell you that we looked at Telus, at Xplornet, at Cogeco, at Vianet, at Netspectrum, at Spacequad, at Galaxy, at Shaw, at Northerntel, at Starlink—and the list goes on and on and on—to see what it would take for you to provide Internet service to some areas of my riding.

I'll put Starlink aside. Starlink would provide Internet connection to my house, which is fairly close to Sudbury. All I have to do is pay \$931.12 for the equipment, and then it would cost me \$158.20 a month for Starlink. But they also told me that they are at capacity in my area, and that my order won't be fulfilled until 2023—but they still want \$129 right now to put me on the list. This is at the low end for Starlink. For some of you who don't know, Starlink can cost between \$599 and \$2,500 for the people in my riding to be connected, and then the monthly—nobody is at \$110; that's a no-go. It's more between \$160 and \$500 a month to be connected to Starlink. But, as I said, you have to put your money down, but it won't happen till sometime in 2023, if you are lucky.

Is it just me who thinks that putting up 2,500 bucks for equipment and then being on the hook for \$500 a month in fees to connect to the Internet meets the goal of the government? Yes, every home, every business would be connected, but this is not it. Nobody should be made to pay \$2,500 to get the equipment and then be on the hook for a contract at \$500 a month to get Internet connections.

I will bring you back, Speaker, to when we used to have Ontera in Ontario. With Ontera, wherever the private sector did not want to set up Internet, the government ran the Internet for those areas. Many, many areas of my riding had Ontera. That was the only Internet provider, because no other Internet providers wanted to come to beautiful places like Ivanhoe Lake and Foleyet and Mattagami and Biscotasing and Westree and Shining Tree and Benny—should I keep on? You get the idea. Those are all beautiful places that the government of Ontario used to bring Internet to; all of those places, Speaker.

Then the Liberal government decided to give Ontera to Bell. Bell was supposed to continue providing Internet

services to those areas. What did Bell do? First of all, they haven't been to those areas since 2013, because when I go, I sort of dust the equipment a little bit. So this is the same equipment that was there in 2013. If you ever put your Internet on hold, you will never be allowed to connect back on. Nobody who moves into the area—you are not allowed to connect back on. You are stuck with Xplornet.

I used to have Xplornet, I will admit. When it first came out, it was great. We had Internet almost like everybody else. It was a beautiful thing. It was more expensive at the time. Internet at that time was like \$60, \$69; we paid \$110 back then, 10 years ago. But at least we had good Internet. Now there are so many people subscribed to Xplornet that—I'm not with Xplornet anymore. It is a frustrating, expensive experience. I cannot go through that again. There's not enough medication—I meant to say meditation—in the world to help me cope with this. It is out of our house. It's not on the roof anymore. It's gone. But there are no other options.

I want the government to realize that to tell people in my riding, "I guarantee you that you will be connected," if that means \$2,500 to get the equipment and then that you have to sign a contract for \$500 a month, you are telling them that they don't matter; that they don't count; that it doesn't matter how important it is for everybody to be connected, this is what Nickel Belt will get. This is what Biscotasing, what Ivanhoe Lake, what Westree—this is what you will get. Because running a—what are the names of those—

Miss Monique Taylor: Fibre optic.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, fibre optic—thank you—is very feasible in Foleyet. The government paid to run the fibre optic to the school. There is a school in Foleyet that has high-speed Internet, and CN. There's also a big CN garage in Foleyet, and they have high-speed Internet. They are the only two. Everybody else either still has Ontera—remember, the dusted equipment from 2013?—or some are still frustrated with Xplornet, and some pay the \$2,500 to have the equipment and the \$500 a month to be connected to Starlink. Really? Anybody sees that this is—you say, "You will all be connected," but at a price that nobody can afford.

That has to be in the bill. Nowhere in the bill do you say that it will be affordable to all of us, because in Nickel Belt, it is not affordable. It doesn't matter how many providers we talk to and say, "What kind of incentive? What will it take for you?" They're nice enough to return my call. They're nice enough that they will talk to me and explain to me, sometimes in—anyway, they do the "splaining" to let me know there is no way in hell they will ever set up a business in a town as small as what is made up in Nickel Belt, and this is way too far, and there is no money to be made, and they are not coming.

So I would love for this bill to also talk about affordability, because an Internet connection that nobody can afford is like you don't have Internet—which brings me back to Ontera. Declare high-speed Internet an essential service like we did way back then with electricity. We bring electricity to all of those little

communities in Nickel Belt. We brought telephone lines to all those little communities.

2040

We still don't have cell service. Remember the promise that was made by Premier Ford to bring cell service? Don't have cell—actually, when I stand at the end of the dock, I have one bar. And if I go—anyway, in my house, forget it; there's no cellphone to be had. Summer is about to come. I spend quite a bit of time on the dock when I'm not working, and there I have cell service, nowhere else.

That's the same thing. To say that they made a promise regarding cell service for all of Ontario and that has been—no, it has not. I can guarantee you, you can drive long distances in Nickel Belt with zero cell connection whatsoever. When it comes back on, it is often not very strong. The cell towers are way too far apart. I can tell you that, unfortunately, we've had a number of road accidents in areas that had no cell service, which ended up not good. But that's not what we're talking about right now.

I don't want to be long. I just don't want the people in northern rural Ontario, the people I represent, to be forgotten. And because you don't talk about affordability in the bill, because you don't make sure that the last mile would be a mile that will fit the people of Nickel Belt's needs for Internet, because you don't use language that says, "We will treat this as an essential service; we will ensure that there is affordability, that there is equity of access," like we do for hydro, then the people of Nickel Belt feel like, "This is not for us." They can say that every single house will have it, but if you have to pay \$500 a month and \$2,500 to be connected, then that's not for us.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt for her speech this evening. I hope that when the summer comes around, if I do call her, she's out on the dock so that she will answer the phone, because I'd be disappointed if I didn't get an answer. And you know that I have called you at your—and you've answered and you said yourself, "I'm outside because I don't have good cell service inside."

We don't have great cell service everywhere either in my riding, but this is the commitment that the Premier made, and it's already in progress. The member knows that just like it's not Chia Internet, it's not Chia cell towers either. These things do take some time, but we have a government that is committed to it. Is this bill not a gigantic step to get people in Ontario connected?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is absolutely going in the right direction. Everybody in Ontario should have access to high-speed, affordable Internet, no matter where they are, no matter where their businesses are. If you run an outfitter business in my riding, you need to have a website. This is how the tourists find you. You need to have access to the Internet. This is how they make reservations to your outfitters. Outfitters are out in the bush. They bring people fishing, hunting, blueberry picking, whatever.

But I agree with you, it is a step in the right direction. We just want to make sure that direction will include

everyone at a price they can afford, and right now, we are worried.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Sudbury.

Mr. Jamie West: Thank you to the member from Nickel Belt. I think we would all agree, on either side of the House, that she's one of our top MPPs. She talked a lot about affordability, Speaker. She talked about not having access to high-speed Internet. I can attest to that, because parts of my community are overlapped in the greater city of Sudbury with Nickel Belt. We had Zoom calls together, and part of my job was to let people know that France's Internet had crashed, because it happens that often. And then I'd phone her on her phone line, because there's no cell service. This reminds me of I don't know how many years ago, when my father-in-law had a construction company for many years and when faxes came in. At one point, he said, "In order to compete, you need a fax line." But the difference is that a fax line is a phone line, and it was the same price no matter where you lived. But when the member from Nickel Belt talks about a grand just to sign up and 150 bucks, 200 bucks a month, that's a lack of affordability. Can you explain what it means to compete as a family or a business when you don't have access to affordable Internet?

Mme France Gélinas: It's quite simple: Unless you can afford to pay \$2,500 to get the equipment, can afford to pay \$500 a month to be connected to Starlink, you don't have Internet. Once you don't have Internet—everybody who stood up and talked to this bill all gave real-life examples as to what it means to not have Internet. It means that your farm cannot work. It means that your outfitters cannot book tourists. It means that your kids cannot go to school. It means that you cannot see your doctor online, because it's a pandemic and this is how things are done. It means you that you cannot get discharged from the hospital, because they want to be able to connect with you for your blood pressure and everything else. It means that you are missing out on a whole lot of things. The Internet has become an essential service.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill.

Mr. Michael Parsa: I thank my honourable colleague. It's always good listening to her. I wanted to ask her a question. I remember right after this bill was presented, I walked over to the Minister of Infrastructure and I thanked her and congratulated her on behalf of the residents of Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill. I mentioned this at second reading.

It was puzzling. When you look at a riding like Richmond Hill, which is just 40-plus kilometres north of Toronto here, there are areas in my riding that don't have access to high-speed Internet. There are farm businesses along my riding where they were telling me that they can't compete. They can't sell their product because they don't have access to high-speed Internet.

Of course, when you look at the numbers and investment of the previous government, from 2007 to 2018, only \$530 million was invested. Now, there's this historic

investment of \$4 billion to connect every single corner of this province to high-speed Internet.

I'm wondering if my colleague can elaborate on why it's so important. I'm glad to hear that you'll be supporting it, but why is it so important—

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

Back to the member from Nickel Belt.

Mme France Gélinas: Actually, I was there when the member did his speech, and I think he did a pretty good job of explaining why it is important for everybody to have Internet. It has become an essential service. This is how we connect with our health care providers. This is how our kids connect with school. This is how you connect with the rest of your family over Zoom, over FaceTime, so that you can see grandma and she can see her grandkids. This is how you do business. This is how you book an outfitter. This is how you make a lot of purchases. It has become an essential service, and it needs to be available to all.

I see that through the investments. We see more and more around the urban areas that are being covered by the Internet. I see the announcements made by the government every day, and that makes me happy. But Nickel Belt doesn't have a big urban area. We are northern and rural, and we deserve equitable access.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Oshawa has a question.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As we've heard, there are lots that have been bought or awarded during the reverse auction. We have yet to know who has gotten what, which big players, medium-sized players or small ISPs, whatever, have been successful.

If Nickel Belt were to fall in one of these significantly-sized geographical lots, I'm assuming, because there are only 93 of them, do you have a booming metropolis in what you imagine that map chunk would be, where there would be a big trunk line, and then all of the other small houses and homes would be able to get that wireless service? Who would you imagine would be providing service that will be able to cover that whole plot, and how would you imagine that could be affordable? What could that look like?

Mme France Gélinas: The only way to make this happen and make it affordable is for the government to step in and say, "We will put forward an equity lens. We realize how important it is for everybody to be connected. We recognize that there are areas of the province where there is no money to be made." The private sector will never go there. It doesn't matter if the government pays for all of the equipment and has it all set up and gives it all to them, there is no money to be made. The only way to connect part of our province is to consider it an essential service and for the government to step in. Like we consider water an essential service, we consider hydro an essential service and we make sure that everybody is connected, the same principle will need to apply for parts of Nickel Belt to be connected at a price that people can afford.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Brantford-Brant has a question.

Mr. Will Bouma: Speaker, through you to the member from Nickel Belt, I was so pleased to hear from just about every member that's spoken from the opposition side today their full support for what we're doing here. They have questions, obviously, and I trust that they will hold us to account on these promises, also, to expand Internet.

I just wanted to congratulate the NDP for supporting us as we do this major push on infrastructure. I was wondering if the member from Nickel Belt, when we move forward again after the next election, when we have a strong, stable Conservative government moving forward, whether they will support us again on our next push forward on infrastructure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Back to the member from Nickel Belt for perhaps her final answer.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I like the optimism that he puts forward in his question. I'm not as clairvoyant as the member is as to be able to tell what the next election's results are going to be and what the next government's plan for broadband is going to be, but I have a bill right here in front of me that I need to vote for, and it's going in the right direction. I just want you to realize that there are areas of the province where affordable Internet is not covered in that bill. I want that bill to bring equity of

access to every household, to every business, to every farm, to every outfitter. The reason why we're standing up and talking about a bill that we will support is to make sure that we make it better. We make it better when we put an equity lens to make sure that it is affordable and available to all of us.

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

Miss Surma has moved third reading of Bill 93, An Act to amend the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it now resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Orders of the day? I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further business, the business of the day having been concluded, this House stands adjourned until 10:15 tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2054.

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: Valerie Quioc Lim, Wai Lam (William) Wong,

Meghan Stenson, Christopher Tyrell

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

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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
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 of Legislative Affairs / Ministre des Affaires législatives Minister of Long-Term Care / Ministre des Soins de longue durée 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, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation (GTA) / Ministre associé des Transports (RGT)
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	
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	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
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 Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism / Ministre des Affaires civiques et du Multiculturalisme
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, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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 Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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	
Karpoche, 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, Hon. / L'hon. Jane (PC)	Burlington	Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues / Ministre associée déléguée au dossier de l'Enfance et à la Condition féminine
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 (IND)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (OP)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (IND)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cookville	Associate Minister of Digital Government / Ministre associé délégué de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre du Développement du Nord, des Mines, des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Guratan (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 Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises et à la Réduction des formalités administratives
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
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
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, Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Vacant	Ajax / Ajax	
Vacant	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Vacant	Elgin—Middlesex—London	

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Michael Parsa, Randy Pettapiece
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Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
Ernie Hardeman, Mitzie Hunter
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Will Bouma, Guy Bourgouin
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Randy Pettapiece, Gurratan Singh
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Rima Berns-McGown, France Gélinas
Goldie Ghamari, Mike Harris
Faisal Hassan, Jim McDonell
Sam Oosterhoff, Laurie Scott
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
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John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
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Sam Oosterhoff, Tom Rakocevic
Sara Singh, Donna Skelly
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell