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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 25 February 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 25 février 2021

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers/Prières.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ACCELERATING ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT, 2021 LOI DE 2021 VISANT À ACCÉLÉRER L'ACCÈS À LA JUSTICE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 24, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 245, An Act to amend and repeal various statutes, to revoke various regulations and to enact the Ontario Land Tribunal Act, 2021 / Projet de loi 245, Loi modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois, abrogeant divers règlements et édictant la Loi de 2021 sur le Tribunal ontarien de l'aménagement du territoire.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, in my debate on this issue, I was talking about the Accelerating Access to Justice Act. I had a conversation with a lawyer yesterday. The lawyer said that lawyers in Ontario actually cringe when they have to read out the titles of the bills of this government in court, because the title of the bill is so often the opposite of what the bill actually does. This bill, I argued yesterday, called the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, is a further erosion of the legal rights and access to justice for the people of Ontario.

I'll just give a couple of examples. This government has cut legal aid by 30%. They've cut legal funding, which means that the lowest-income—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I'm sorry to interrupt the member.

Would the conversations please cease or quiet down? I am unable to hear the member who has the floor, and he is the only member who has the floor at this time. Thank you.

Please continue.

Mr. Chris Glover: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This government cut legal aid by 30%, which means that the lowest-income Ontarians do not have legal aid lawyers available to represent them.

This is particularly important right now with the eviction blitz and tens of thousands of eviction hearings

going on across this province. In these eviction hearings, there is little respect for due process. Some of the people being evicted, because they are low-income or because of language barriers, do not have access to the Internet, so they are not able to participate in the hearing in which their housing is being taken away from them. Many of these tenants are not bad tenants. Many of them are being renocted by landlords who want to kick them out so that they can raise the rents on a new tenant.

Another example of the loss of our legal rights and access to justice with this bill is expropriations. An expropriation is when the government wants to take over your private property. Instead of accelerating access to justice, this bill reduces legal rights over expropriations.

In a previous bill, this government had taken away the right that people had to a hearing of necessity when their property was being expropriated. If the government said, "Hey, we want to take over your house and buy you out," previously, the person whose property was being taken over could appeal for a hearing of necessity, and the government would have to justify before a judge or an adjudicator the reason for that expropriation. That right for the hearing of necessity has been taken away. This is particularly relevant in my part of downtown Toronto, because the government has begun the expropriation of the first Parliament site, throwing into jeopardy years of public consultations and planning for a library and community amenities on the site.

Another section of this bill that further erodes our legal rights is the combining of five tribunals into one. The Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, the Environmental Review Tribunal, the Mining and Lands Tribunal, the Conservation Review Board and the Board of Negotiation are all being combined into one tribunal. The purpose of these tribunals is that they are supposed to be faster and cheaper, and the adjudicators have particular expertise on mining or planning or the environment. They have particular expertise that you would not have if this went to a court before a judge. But now, an adjudicator from the mining tribunal may hear a planning decision without the expertise, and so it undermines the very purpose of these tribunals. Although many people may not have heard of these tribunals, they actually are utilized by 100,000 Ontarians every year.

The other right that is being taken away in this bill is appeals to the minister. Schedule 10 strips environmentalists and other Ontarians of the right to appeal a decision to a minister of the government. This right was most famously used in stopping the Spadina expressway, which would have put an expressway between the Allen

expressway down Spadina Avenue to the Gardiner. It would have been a horrific scar through the middle of our beautiful downtown in Toronto. But the community was able to stop it through an appeal to a minister of the government. Now, this government is taking that appeal right away from Ontarians.

The final issue in this bill that I want to talk about is judicial appointments. This government is politicizing judicial appointments. Currently, judges in Ontario are appointed through the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee. It's an arm's-length process in place where associations of lawyers appoint judges. But with this legislation, the Attorney General, who is a member of the Conservative government and subject to the Conservative Party whip, will have the final say in judicial appointments.

It's not just my opinion that this erodes the legal rights and the access to justice for the people of Ontario. There was an article in the Law Times. The article reads—and I will read it in part—“The Ontario government’s proposed changes to the Judicial Appointments Advisory”—

Interjection.

Mr. Chris Glover: To the member opposite, listen to what the Criminal Lawyers’ Association—what I’m reading here. Then, if you want to ask me a question about it, you’d be more than welcome.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. Chris Glover: This is the article: “The Ontario government’s proposed changes to the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee undermine its independence and risk politicizing the judicial appointments process, say the president and a vice president of the Criminal Lawyers’ Association.” Daniel Brown, the vice president of the Criminal Lawyers’ Association says, “‘Our concern is that the independence of the appointment committee is under attack’ ... ‘This is an attempt to fix a system that wasn’t broken.’”

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The member from Durham will come to order.

Mr. Chris Glover: “‘There was no difficulty getting highly qualified, highly diverse candidates on the provincial court bench. And in fact, this model of judicial appointments was the gold standard across Canada.’”

The Criminal Lawyers’ Association president, John Struthers, says, “‘This does not need fixing’ ... ‘It is a perversion and a corruption of the appointment process that everyone in the system opposes’ ... ‘Now, rather than those organizations having independent choice over their representatives, it’s ... subject to the AG’s approval,’ says Brown. ‘And so that’s something that undermines the independence of the committee itself.’”

The appointment of judges is such a crucial part of access to justice. The judges must be appointed through a non-partisan process like the JAAC that we currently have. When you politicize it, when the Attorney General, who is a Conservative MPP, makes the decision on who will and

will not be a judge, you are undermining the access to justice for the people of Ontario.

0910

For many years, this government has been eroding the legal and democratic rights of the people of Ontario. This bill is another step in that direction. It is depriving people of property rights through the expropriation sections by allowing a Conservative MPP, the Attorney General, to have the final say in appointments of judges. It’s also undermining our access to justice rights by further eroding people’s rights in tribunal hearings. By combining five different tribunal bodies, it is undermining our access to justice. And by stripping environmentalists and others of the right to appeal a decision to the government, it is undermining our access to justice. Madam Speaker, I would ask that the government not pass this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. A reminder to all members to direct their comments to and through the Chair. The cross-talk will not be tolerated. All members will have the opportunity during questions and comments to get their voice on the record.

To that end, questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much to the member across from Spadina–Fort York. Currently—he refers to it as JAAC, the Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee—they don’t publish diversity statistics. The application form provides the opportunity for self-identification regarding diversity, but we have no way of knowing whether or not we are attracting as many diverse candidates as we could or should be.

The Accelerating Access to Justice Act proposed to make it mandatory that the JAAC publish detailed diversity statistics in their annual reports using information that applicants already voluntarily provide during the application process. By collecting these statistics, we have a chance to analyze, improve and even promote diversity on our bench.

Will the member opposite join our government and support bringing forward the changes that increase transparency surrounding the diversity of judicial candidates being considered? And if not, then I ask, why not?

Mr. Chris Glover: I’m fully supportive of the idea of increasing the diversity of positions of power such as judges in this province. But you don’t need to politicize the process. You can ask the JAAC to collect those statistics without giving the Attorney General the power to decide who is going to be a judge and who is not. It should not be a Conservative MPP who decides who will and will not be a judge in this province. That’s politicizing the process. It’s unnecessary to achieve the goal of increasing the diversity on our benches.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I’m really thankful for my colleague the member for Spadina–Fort York because he has done an exemplary job in dissecting the bill and relating it back to his constituents as to the impact of the content of the bill, which is obviously a large bill—it

changes around 11 schedules, I believe—and has various ramifications for real, tangible access to justice on the ground.

I am concerned; he raised the point around the ability for the Attorney General to singularly appoint justices through that process. I wonder what the correlations are to the way that the United States does it. We know that the goal not only is to elect a partisan president but to allow that president to then nominate folks to the Supreme Court that stack the court. That's always the game. How close are we getting to the formula that the United States applies?

Mr. Chris Glover: This is such a fundamental question about our democracy, the independent appointment of judges. It was foreseen centuries ago, when modern democracies were first being developed, that you need to have an independent judiciary that's separate from the government, because if the judiciary is beholden to the particular government of the day, then the judiciary is no longer a system of justice. It's a system of imposing the power of the government of the day on the people of the province and, in our case, of the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Question?

Ms. Lindsey Park: I do want to clarify, whether it's a PC government, a Liberal government or an NDP government, it's always been the Attorney General that appoints judges. That's not a change. There seems to be some confusion about that.

Have you been supportive of the NDP Attorney General in the past appointing judges?

Mr. Chris Glover: The process used to be that the JAAC, the judicial advisory committee, would provide a recommendation to the Attorney General and the Attorney General would approve that. Now, the committee has been asked to provide six potential representatives and then the Attorney General will pick from the six. This gives the Attorney General much greater leeway to find somebody who supports their partisan views.

That's why the criminal law association is saying that this system should not be imposed on the people of the province because it undermines the judiciary of Ontario, the independence of the judges in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Good morning. I would like to thank my colleague from Spadina–Fort York for eloquently addressing the problems we have with this bill. He talked about the impact of cuts to legal aid and how it affects communities like mine in York South–Weston and across the province.

I would like to ask my colleague from Spadina–Fort York, could you elaborate on the importance of access to justice, and not having a lawyer, not having representation, the impact that will have across the province?

Mr. Chris Glover: I thank the member for his question; it is just so important. These cuts to legal aid, the 30% cut to legal aid services across this province, has

undermined the access to justice for the lowest-income Ontarians.

As I said in my speech, it's particularly relevant right now because this government has launched an eviction blitz through the Landlord and Tenant Board across this province. There are thousands of people being evicted without access to a lawyer to represent them. Many of the people who are being evicted, because of language barriers, do not have an understanding of the process that they're being subjected to. Some of them do not have access to the Internet, and these are online decisions. So they are being evicted without understanding or being able to have access to due process.

The member is absolutely right. The cuts to legal aid are having real ramifications for tenants and citizens across this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Good morning. The proposed legislation includes critical changes to help offices like the Offices of the Children's Lawyer and the Public Guardian and Trustee to do very important work, particularly when we take into account that we're in COVID right now. Will the member opposite join us in supporting the Offices of the Children's Lawyer and the Public Guardian and Trustee by giving them the tools they need to help and protect Ontarians?

Mr. Chris Glover: One of the challenges with this government is every bill that's brought here is an omnibus bill with multiple schedules talking about multiple different issues. So there may be something good in this bill, but it's overridden.

In the opposition, we cannot support this bill because we do not want a partisan judicial appointment process. We do not want a further erosion of the rights of people to their property through an expropriation process. We want to increase people's access to legal aid so that they have legal representation and due process when they are being brought before a tribunal or a court, so we cannot support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I want to go back to the bill, titled Accelerating Access to Justice Act. I want to talk about legal aid. I say that because David McKillop, the vice-president at legal aid, reports that the bill, access to justice—he says the backlog “is a significant problem, there is no doubt” of that, of course. He went on to say that, “In recognition of this, Legal Aid Ontario is funding defence lawyers to attend more pre-trial discussions with judges and crowns in order to resolve cases more quickly....”

“But the organization, which provides legal services to low-income, marginalized Ontarians, continues to face a significant projected budget shortfall, estimated at about \$56 million in their next fiscal year.”

Can you speak to the fact that the bill says “access to justice” and then how legal aid, which provides access to

justice, is far from giving people that justice they're seeking?

0920

Mr. Chris Glover: I think the actions of this government have to be looked at not as just this particular bill, which erodes our democratic rights and our access to justice, but as a whole. This government has consistently undermined our rights. I mentioned about the expropriation, the hearings of necessity. This one politicizes, and it's not me saying it; it's the Criminal Lawyers' Association who are saying that this government is politicizing the judicial appointment process.

Previously, on September 12, 2018, this government voted on Bill 31 to strip Ontarians of their charter rights—I think it's 5 and 7 through 12 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—in order to undermine and change the rules of the Toronto municipal election in the middle of the campaign period. This government has a horrific record of undermining the democratic and legal rights of this province. This particular bill is another step in that erosion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Good morning, everyone. I rise today to contribute to the debate on Bill 245, Accelerating Access to Justice Act. Given my limited time, I'm going to focus my comments primarily on schedules 6 and 10 of the bill.

I want to begin by echoing the concerns that other members have raised in this chamber, who have rightly pointed out that in order to actually accelerate access to justice for everyone, we need to properly fund the legal aid system. Cuts to legal aid are actually accelerating barriers to accessing justice, and I would say it's an issue that comes up repeatedly in my constituency office.

We also need to ensure that any technological changes to our justice system are accompanied by accommodations for those who may not have access to reliable broadband Internet or affordable technology. I've had many people reach out to my office, particularly in the last couple of months, with concerns about barriers to accessing the Landlord and Tenant Board during COVID for hearings, especially since those hearings relate to their possible evictions.

We should not be creating barriers for people to access justice, which brings me to schedules 6 and 10 of the bill. I'm very concerned that several proposed changes in these schedules will limit public participation and access to justice.

My first concern is that the bill removes the ability for non-party participation at tribunal hearings. The Environmental Review Tribunal in particular currently allows non-parties to make oral submissions at hearings; now this will be limited, if this bill would pass, to written submissions only. This undermines public participation in environmental and land use decisions. Many of these decisions affect people who may not be direct party to the hearing, and I believe the public has a right for their voices to be heard on these issues. This also allows people who may not have access to legal representation to participate

in hearings without cost barriers. I don't want to see those changes take place in this bill.

Bill 245 would also allow tribunals to dismiss a proceeding if they believe that the proceeding has no reasonable prospect of success. This, too, will limit access to justice. It does not accelerate access to justice, as the bill purports to do. Everyone deserves a right to a hearing.

My third concern is that schedule 10 limits appeals to questions of law under the EPA, the Environmental Protection Act. This is extremely concerning, Speaker, because there will no longer be an avenue for the public to appeal on a decision on the basis of fact or policy. This means that people will not have the ability to appeal a decision they believe would have a negative effect on the environment or the health and safety of their community. Instead, the only mechanism for recourse would be to appeal to Divisional Court, only on a question of law. This will severely narrow the scope of what can be appealed.

My fourth concern is that the amalgamation of several tribunals into one Ontario Land Tribunal will result in a loss of expertise. The strength of having very specific tribunals, like the Environmental Review Tribunal, is the expertise in the adjudicators, so I'm confused about the rationale the government has for this amalgamation. The government has stated that the changes will eliminate unnecessary overlap between cases, but this could have been addressed by amending the Consolidated Hearings Act to give a tribunal authority to consolidate multiple tribunals into one single hearing, without eliminating the individual tribunals. I don't understand why the government is using such a drastic mechanism to achieve that objective when they have other means at their disposal.

Finally, since this bill makes significant changes to important environmental legislation, I believe it is essential that relevant parts of the bill be posted on the Environmental Registry for public consultation before it continues to committee. There are several changes with these schedules that will most definitely impact how decisions are made that affect the environment and the public's ability to participate in defending their environmental rights, if this is not posted on the registry. The Environmental Bill of Rights clearly states that any policy that may have "a significant effect on the environment" shall be posted for the public to comment on for at least 30 days. I believe that failure to post relevant sections of this bill on the EBR violates people's EBR rights.

Speaker, I want to conclude by saying this bill continues a disturbing trend that started on day one of this government: to eliminate environmental protections that protect the health and safety of our community. That's why I encourage members to oppose particularly the schedules that I have outlined. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, you will know that this legislation includes amendments to strengthen the work of the Public Guardian and Trustee in several ways. I haven't heard any debate or focus on this important series of

amendments by the members of the opposition or the independents at all.

Will the member from Guelph stand in his place and say whether he supports these amendments to the important work of the Public Guardian and Trustee? Yes or no?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. Yes, of course, there are some aspects of the bill—schedule 2, for example, which I think you've just raised—that I would support, no doubt about it. But there are significant concerns with this bill that make me unable to support it.

I have focused my comments on two particular schedules, but to be honest with you, those aren't my only concerns. Other members have raised concerns around the possible opening to the politicization of the appointment of judges, which concerns me as well. The costs outweigh the benefits on the whole, even if there are sections that I would support.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the member from Guelph for his comments this morning on the bill. I think that we share a concern. You mentioned the Landlord and Tenant Board and the problems that people are having accessing those mechanisms—with an eye on that we were told that they were going to help people access justice in there. I now have small landlords and tenants coming to me, saying that they cannot maneuver the system that is in place because of a lack of access to technology, or streamlining so severe that it has actually made access in the north terrible for folks.

I am wondering, in your area, how are people managing with these kinds of supposed access to justice?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. An issue that's coming up a lot in my riding, and it sounds like up in your riding in Thunder Bay and I would assume in other ridings across the province, is the lack of adjudicators, particularly at the landlord-tenant tribunal. I've had tenants and landlords complaining so this isn't just one or the other; it's literally both tenants and landlords complaining. If the government wants to accelerate access to justice, particularly at the Landlord and Tenant Board, hiring enough adjudicators to do that is important.

0930

One of the concerns I have specifically in the bill, though, is that any changes to technology must be done in a way that provides access, particularly for those who don't have the means to access certain types of technology or reliable broadband to access that technology.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I'm glad to hear the member is supportive of schedule 2.

I wanted to ask him about the judicial backlog. We talk about accelerating access to justice and making sure everyone has their fair trial and due time. One of the issues that we have experienced is, of course, the massive

backlog. That affects a lot of the environmental hearings that we need to hear because there is such a significant backlog. Often those individuals are waiting years upon years. Because of this particular legislation, it's clearing the backlog, being able to have more of those environmental hearings.

What's more is they just need to go to one table as opposed to wasting their time going to multiple tables, which causes delays and lots of expenses.

Does the member believe in clearing the backlog, allowing for those hearings to happen?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question. Most of the feedback I have been receiving about backlogs is actually a lack of adjudicators. If the government wants to clear the backlog, actually putting the resources in the system to have enough adjudicators to clear the backlog, to me, is the best solution.

Eliminating the Environmental Review Tribunal, in particular, but some of the other tribunals that are being amalgamated into a single one, means that we're going to lose expertise—vital expertise. I outlined in my remarks that there are other ways that the government can address the issue around consolidated hearings without eliminating these vital tribunals.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Madam Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise in the House today and add my comments to the second reading debate of Bill 245, Accelerating Access to Justice Act, 2021. I want to start by saying I have been very impressed with the team in the Attorney General's office and the work they have been doing to improve things within our justice system.

Maybe my situation is unique, but in Sarnia-Lambton, my constituency office happens to be right across the street from the provincial courthouse. As a result, I often tell my lawyer friends we are often the first stop for constituents after they run into roadblocks at the courthouse. I've heard from many constituents and families over the years who have been really frustrated by the legal system, and for many reasons. That's why I'm quite optimistic to work with the team in the Attorney General's office.

Bill 245, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, represents another big step, Madam Speaker, towards improving access to justice by modernizing complicated and dated processes that our justice system has had for too long. The changes presented in Bill 245 offer some simple changes that will help to create an easier, faster and more accessible justice system across all communities in Ontario.

Bill 245 builds on Ontario's recent modernization breakthroughs in the justice system and presents urgent reforms to address delays in the resolution of legal disputes, both inside and outside of the courtroom. I for one think that the more things we can handle outside of the courtroom, the better.

Speaker, it's hard to believe that we've been dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic for close to a full year now. We've all seen the widespread impact it has had. It's given

us all a chance to adapt and learn to do things differently, and the justice system should be no different. Bill 245 seizes on that opportunity and provides some much-needed support and relief in that sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed nearly every aspect of life for Ontarians. For our government, it underscored the urgent need to change and modernize systems across every sector. In the justice system, COVID-19 highlighted that the old way of doing things needed a rethink or an important pillar of our democracy would be lost to many. Expanding the range of court and justice services offered online and finding ways for people to access those services closer to where they live was a priority for the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Madam Speaker, the breakthrough modernization initiative in this bill will transform how Ontarians access justice, including in more remote communities such as rural, northern, francophone and Indigenous communities, where you often have to travel further for legal representation. It will break down barriers in the province's courts, tribunals, estates laws, family law and much more. This bill will bring about a more equitable and responsive system.

Every government ministry has faced new and unanticipated challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As I mentioned earlier, the team at the Ministry of the Attorney General has been particularly good at reading the situation and adapting to the situation. In fact, this is the fourth bill that he has introduced in the past 12 months. For those who may have forgotten already, two of the previous bills introduced by the Attorney General were Bill 161, the Smarter and Stronger Justice Act, 2020, and Bill 207, Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act, 2020. These were excellent bills that were passed by this Legislature and have now become law.

I was a particular fan of the Moving Ontario Family Law Forward Act. I'm sure every member of this Legislature understands the challenges that their constituents face with family law. The parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General, the member for Durham, came to Sarnia-Lambton a few years ago and had some really great conversations with a number of my constituents, stakeholders and lawyers, all involved in the family law system. I just want to acknowledge how much I appreciated that. I know my constituents appreciate the fact that a lot of their feedback helped in the drafting of this bill.

I am just as confident that the changes proposed in Bill 245, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act, will receive a similar positive response from my constituents if it is passed into law. With Bill 245, our government has responded to the unique challenges presented by the pandemic with practical plans for change and a vision for an easier, less costly and faster justice system for Ontarians across this province. It drives forward continuous efforts to accelerate justice modernization with concrete action to remove barriers to the justice system.

One of the ways they did this was in the proposal to merge the five land tribunals—the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal, the Environmental Review Tribunal, the Board

of Negotiation, the Conservation Review Board and the Mining and Lands Tribunal—into one single tribunal posted on the Environmental Registry. The main reason to do this was intended to help reduce delays and make the land dispute resolution process more efficient by creating a single forum to resolve disputes faster and eliminate unnecessary overlap between cases.

The expert non-partisan officials at the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks advised that the proposed consolidation would not have a significant effect on the environment and it would not reduce or eliminate hearing or appeal rights before the tribunals, and therefore did not need to be posted on the registry. The creation of the Ontario Land Tribunals is predominantly an administrative change that would build on the government's commitment to create a more accessible, responsive and resilient justice system that resolves disputes quickly and fairly.

With Bill 245, our government has responded to the unique challenges presented by the pandemic with practical plans for change and a vision for an easier, less costly and faster justice system for Ontarians across the province. It drives forward continuous efforts to accelerate justice modernization with concrete efforts to remove barriers in the justice system. The people of Sarnia-Lambton, my constituents, demand and depend on a system that works for the people. I'm proud to support the work of the Attorney General, his staff and the PA, in cooperation with our justice sector partners, in seeing this bill through to this stage.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of sections of Bill 245 that have been discussed already by different members of this Legislature during the debate. I'm going to focus my attention right now on the changes in the bill that will update Ontario's estates law.

I don't like it when they print on both sides of the paper. I get mixed up more than usual.

0940

Personally, I have never had the responsibility of being the executor of a will before, but my wife has, and I've seen first-hand how difficult and how complicated that action can be. So I was particularly interested to read in this bill the changes that are proposed. The parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General also did an excellent job in her remarks of explaining this section of Bill 245. I am going to reiterate a number of areas that she emphasized because I believe they are of the utmost importance.

First, I want to speak specifically about the proposed changes in Bill 245 that will benefit seniors who may enter predatory marriages. This change will also benefit separated spouses who may forget to change their will to reflect their new relationship status.

Under the current law, if you have a will and get married, your will is automatically revoked upon your new marriage. Whatever you paid for it, it doesn't matter; it's not an accepted document anymore. That means if a couple walks into a lawyer's office to make a will because they plan to get married, they actually have to draft up a special version of the will. I had never heard this before,

so it's good to know, everybody out there in TV land. It's known as a will in the contemplation of marriage—too bad a lot of people haven't put a little more contemplation into marriage. Anyway, you've probably never heard of that—I certainly hadn't—but that's the way the law is written now. In Bill 245, the government is fixing this confusing rule. I think that's great.

If passed, Bill 245 would repeal section 16 of the Succession Law Reform Act—yes, okay—which automatically reforms the will upon marriage. This will provide more predictability to, say, a successful 30-year-old man or woman who has a will and later marries to ensure that the 30-year-old's will will be in place once they marry and their wishes are respected. This will also help to address the issue of predatory marriages. That's why I'm getting mixed up: They're using the same lines there again.

With the proposed change in Bill 245, it will be an intentional choice of when and how you are to change your will, perhaps before marriage, or if you decide not to get married, but you're purchasing major assets together—if you're purchasing a car, your first home or another major asset with your significant other—maybe both your names are on the title of that new asset.

Under these proposed reforms, an inheritance to married spouses who are separated would also be eliminated in the same way that divorced spouses do not inherit. It's a bit of another strange rule, but if you officially get divorced, then it's understood that you probably didn't mean for your will that you made while you were married to apply, and so your will automatically doesn't apply. But if you are separated and never actually got divorced, or you never were married and separate, there's no way that the will changes.

I know reading this, I'm thinking of a case back in my riding where this happened to an individual. He fully intended for a young lady who he raised as his daughter to inherit the bulk of his estate. He never changed his will. He died. The new wife and her children got most of the bulk of the estate. The girl, the young lady who he raised, was SOL, I guess, for want of another word.

This change will help to ensure that when someone passes away, their assets are going to go to the people that they truly intended them to go to. That is why we're extending section 17 of the Succession Law Reform Act.

Another major change in Bill 245 that will help the courts adapt to the changing circumstances in which people are doing wills is that the bill proposes granting courts the authority to validate wills that do not precisely meet the legislated formalities of a will.

Currently, there is something called a strict compliance regime. These are the very technical requirements that must be met when you do your will—all scintillating subjects this early on a Thursday morning. There are very technical requirements that must be met by you when you do your will. It's deemed invalid if you do not meet those requirements. This is why we heard stories of people running around, meeting in parking lots and front yards, witnessing wills through windows in the middle of the

pandemic. People were trying to follow public health guidelines and distance, but still properly meet the formal legal requirements.

With the proposed changes in Bill 245, we're building in a new power for the courts to be able to validate wills that were not properly executed. This isn't lowering the standard in any way. In fact, a judge will do their due diligence and ask for evidence of what that person intended and make sure what's laid out in the will was the intention of that person. This is a new power that the courts don't currently have or are hesitant to use. These are just a few practical changes that are included in Bill 245 that will arm Ontarians with tools to deal with their estate matters in a flexible way.

There are a number of exceptions, as well, to the elimination of the minister's appeal from tribunal decisions—I'd like to get this on the record as there was a suggestion or an inference that loopholes existed for political influence in these appeal boards. The tribunals are established to provide impartial decision-making that is independent of government. This proposal to eliminate appeals to a minister from decisions of the Environmental Review Tribunal and the Mining and Lands Tribunal would be consistent with the objectives of a modern administrative justice system and with the other land tribunals whose decisions are not appealable to a minister. This is an important step forward to acknowledge the independence and impartiality of the tribunal and political decision-making.

Madam Speaker, there is so much to Bill 245 that is going to help improve our justice system moving forward. I'll spend my last few minutes going over a very high-level summary. As I mentioned earlier, I think the team working with the Attorney General has done an excellent job drafting this bill. I know I spoke with the Attorney General a number of months ago. He said at that time—and this is long before we're here today—that COVID-19 has brought the justice system 25 years in 25 days because we were forced to make changes, forced to make improvements that would have never come up, because so many people who have a vested interest from all sides would have had no appetite for change. Change was forced upon us. Hopefully this will be far better for people. If there's something that maybe came out of COVID that in some small way could be positive, it could be these improvements to the justice system.

As I mentioned earlier, I think the team, with the Attorney General and his PA, the member for Durham, have done an excellent job. The Accelerating Access to Justice Act, 2021, would, if passed, transform the ways Ontarians access the justice system in the courtroom and beyond in rural, northern, Indigenous and francophone communities.

If passed, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act will:

—help fill judicial vacancies more quickly so Ontarians will be able to have their matters heard by a judge in a timely manner and within fewer days;

—permanently allow the virtual witnessing of wills and powers of attorney to make it easier for people to get these

important affairs in order without the limitations of travelling to access these services in-person;

- promote the interests of children by giving children—I think this is one of the most important things—a greater voice in the court process and better focusing on resources of the Office of the Children’s Lawyer;

- create the Ontario Land Tribunal to reduce delays and make the land dispute resolution process more efficient by creating a single forum to resolve disputes;

- increase access to justice in French by expanding and guaranteeing the ability of francophones to file documents in French at all Ontario courthouses and for all matters, including civil and family law;

- modernizing estate laws, including changes that would help Ontarians resolve their estates quickly, efficiently and safely.

The other issue that was raised was about the appointment of the chair of the JAAC. The question was, are you allowing chairs in the JAAC to stay on as interim or indefinitely? Currently, the Attorney General can only designate a chair for a fixed three-year term, and that same person may serve as chair for two more terms. The government is proposing in this bill to permit the chair to be designated for a term of up to three years instead. The Attorney General would retain the ability to designate that same person as a chair for multiple terms.

This proposed amendment would align with the statutory language used for the chair of the Justices of the Peace Appointments Advisory Committee and the other statutory agencies. This change will facilitate the designation of a chair on a short-term basis when the position becomes vacant unexpectedly by, for example, allowing for a new chair to be designated from the existing committee members for a term that aligns with the remainder of their term as a committee member. Each committee member would continue to hold office for fixed three-year terms.

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Madam Speaker, it would create the Ontario Land Tribunals to reduce delays and make the land dispute resolution process more efficient by creating a single forum to resolve disputes.

It would increase access to justice in French by expanding and guaranteeing the ability of francophones to file documents in French at all Ontario courthouses and for all matters including civil and family law.

It would modernize estates laws, including changes that would help Ontarians resolve their estates and other legal matters quickly, efficiently and safely.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of important changes in this bill. It’s really something that the Attorney General and his parliamentary assistant should be commended for. Everything around us has become more convenient and more accessible over the years, especially with COVID-19 forced on us.

When I was first elected 14 years ago, I don’t think I could ever have imagined the virtual world we are living in now. I didn’t even have a BlackBerry. I didn’t know what the word “Twitter” meant, and maybe some people

wish I had never found out. I remember my first day here, in the Legislature’s dining room. A reporter from down home was here doing a story at that time, and he took a picture of my son showing me how to access and use my BlackBerry. Some people think maybe I never should have taken that lesson.

Anyway, just yesterday I was in a virtual meeting discussing line 5 with leaders from the government and the business community on both sides of the Canada-US border. Last week, I hosted a meeting with 75 different stakeholders, all interested in line 5 and its impact on Ontario, which we’ll hear more about later today—so if you’re watching today, tune in later this afternoon. Just a few years ago, it would have taken months to find a way to pull all of these people together for a meeting that would have had to travel. Now it can be done almost instantly.

Important documents like wills and powers of attorney can be signed and returned on your phone in an instant, as long as you’re following the rules. There’s no need to find time to head down to your lawyer’s office. I know your lawyers are glad to see you, but now we don’t have to do that. That’s no slag on the lawyers present.

Our government is committed to ensuring that Ontario is the best place to live and work anywhere in the world. If at some point you have to access the justice system, our system should be the model that every other jurisdiction aims to replicate. The growth and well-being of Ontario communities demands easier and faster access to justice and a justice system that works for all people.

I think the Attorney General and the parliamentary assistant have done terrific work.

I’ll wind up now. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your courtesy and understanding this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: We’ve seen in this Legislature time and time again—even recently, just a couple of days ago—through government agencies, where this government appoints failed Conservative candidates, donors, friends, insiders to government agencies.

My question to the member opposite is simple: When you are looking at politicizing the appointments of judges, when you are giving the Attorney General the unfettered ability to pick and choose who they want by endless lists of candidates till they get someone they like, how is it that the people of this province are supposed to believe, based on your history with government agencies, that you will not be appointing judges based on their political ideology or whether or not they have supported the Conservative Party in the past?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I’m sure this wouldn’t be the only government that has ever been accused of that, rightly or wrongly.

Madam Speaker, I think the new bill calls for a minimum of six people eligible to be appointed, volunteered by that committee, submitted by that committee. Then, the Attorney General, in consultation with his staff and others, would take a look, narrow that down and come

up with—I'm sure we've had some great appointments in the past.

I know the NDP government put forward people when they were in government, and I'm sure they were very honourable and served well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Ms. Lindsey Park: I enjoyed how you highlighted examples from your constituents.

I want to raise another example that an estates lawyer highlighted to me on how—I think we're all aware—people aren't aware sometimes of the formalities of doing a will. So this bill provides a bit more flexibility around that.

In one particular matter which this lawyer's office became involved in, the deceased died while writing what he had intended to be a holograph will, benefiting his fiancé. The court found the document was not a will, because the deceased's signature appeared at the top of the document, rather than the end after the dispositive provisions, and the judge lacked the jurisdiction to admit the document to probate because of Ontario's strict compliance regime. A great-aunt from whom the deceased had been estranged inherited the estate as a result. This would change that.

Why is that a good thing? And have you heard similar stories in your riding?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member for Durham for that great question. I know she has done a great job advocating for access to justice throughout this province. Like I said earlier, she was down to my riding.

Yes, I've heard of people—I mentioned the one case of a young lady who was more or less disinherited because I guess her father didn't get around to changing his will. He thought everybody would do the right thing someday, but it didn't happen. Nobody is ever ready to go, but some time it's going to happen, so you had better plan ahead.

I've heard about wills that were written—a farmer got injured one time and he wrote what he wanted to happen, it's sad to say, in his own blood on the fender of the tractor. He made a will out, and the fender of the tractor was submitted in the courtroom as evidence.

This will eliminate a lot of those kinds of things. I think it's a great improvement on the system.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a pleasure to stand in my place on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin and to add my question to Bill 245. When I and the people of Algoma-Manitoulin hear words like “modernize,” “streamline” and “accelerate,” those are a lot of the terms we heard under the 15 years of the Liberal government, and the more and more that we're here, I'm hearing a lot of this coming from this government as well.

My question to the member is on access to justice. Is the fact that there have been cuts from 160 adjudicators to 87 adjudicators going to help individuals? Is the fact that in northern Ontario the reality is that we don't have broadband access going to help individuals? Is the fact that

one third of the budget cuts to legal aid—is that going to help individuals across this province? And the fact that you're taking away and you are consolidating five tribunals into one, which is going to bog down the system, which is going to take out a lot of the resources and expertise: Is that going to help people across this province?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member for Algoma-Manitoulin for those great questions. I know about broadband shortages. Even though we live down in sunny southwestern Ontario, we have lots of parts of my riding that don't have adequate broadband either, so I will certainly support what you say there with the improvements to broadband. We need all of that in all parts of Ontario. That's something I'm glad the member brought up, because that's something we're working on with SWIFT and getting more money into all of the different ridings of Ontario to try to get people that last mile, to get them Internet.

But I think I did touch on the five tribunals. It's the feeling of the expert, non-partisan officials at the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, who advised that the proposed consolidation would not have, in their words, “a significant effect on the environment.”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciated the remarks from the member from Sarnia-Lambton on this important piece of legislation.

One of the things that I'm most excited about in this legislation is the move to make permanent virtual witnessing. This was something that our government brought in as a temporary measure as part of an emergency order during COVID, when we wanted to make sure that people weren't going out and putting themselves at risk too often, but now we're going to make this permanent. I think this is a huge step forward in making sure that government and legal services are more accessible to all generations, and pulling government, kicking and screaming, into the 21st century.

I wonder if the member from Sarnia-Lambton could comment a little bit on how this measure and others in this bill are going to really help his constituents.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member from Ottawa for that great question. Yes, the virtual witnessing: I'm really happy to see us go that way. When we're done COVID—hopefully sooner than later—and we stay with virtual witnessing, I'm sure this is going to be great in child custody cases, in domestic violence cases, other issues of violence where people could be intimidated, have been intimidated through their own fears of actually maybe coming into a courtroom—whether it's children, women or men, even, who are maybe intimidated to come into the courtroom and face the accused.

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So I think these types of things, if we move forward with these, that give people the option to appear virtually—I think it can only get better. It can only serve law reform in a better way.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further questions?

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I was just listening to the member from Sarnia–Lambton intently. I know that you will agree that access to justice is very important. Putting in barriers to access to justice—we have seen that many folks now are not able to have representation at the Landlord and Tenant Board and other access to justice. And also, cutting the legal aid support mechanisms—how are we going to improve? This bill doesn't. If you look under schedule 6 and 10, it does make barriers.

Accelerating justice is not access to justice. Would you elaborate how you would improve and make access to justice essential to this bill?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the member from York South–Weston for that great question. I always appreciate your comments and questions in the House.

Well, I'll tell you, I think there can always be improvements to justice and legal aid in all of those forms. I have recently helped a family member of my own through the legal system, and I'll tell you, if you don't have the resources and you don't have somebody behind you to help you, you're in a lot of trouble, because I have seen this. I have seen it and experienced it myself, and a lot of friends of mine and that.

I would certainly encourage the ministry of justice and the Attorney General etc. to look at ways that we can work with the legal system, with the law reform, and to make sure that those types of things are available to every individual in this province—no matter their race, creed, colour or their sexual orientation—and make them all available to them.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents to talk about Bill 245, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act.

First and foremost, what's in this bill is giving politicians the power to affect the appointment process in Ontario, so I want to clarify some information that's coming from the government side of the House, some of the stuff they were glossing over when they were talking about how they were expanding the number of people to be presented at a time for potential appointment from two to six. They're saying that would give the Attorney General the ability to have six people to choose from.

Surely that would eliminate the potential for failed Conservatives or any party candidate, for donors to be weeded out, for people who have historically supported that particular party in the past—surely that would eliminate that from happening, but that is not entirely accurate. That is not the entire picture, but this government doesn't want to talk about that.

In this bill, they are giving the ability for the Attorney General to reject every single candidate that comes forward. So six come forward and the Attorney General says, "Nope, doesn't align with my ideology." Another six come forward: "Nope, haven't run for us." Another six come forward: "Nope, not supporters of ours." And this cycle keeps going and keeps going and keeps going until the Attorney General finds someone who fits the bill perfectly and fits the narrative of the government.

So I want to be clear about that, because that's not information that's coming from the government side. They're trying to tell people that by increasing the number of candidates that can be presented at a time, that somehow makes this less politicized or less partisan. In fact, what they have done is put a process in place that completely politicizes and opens up that process for political appointments, appointments made based on political ideology or political support of a particular party, whoever that may be in power at the time.

As I pointed out, we've seen two appointments this week at government agencies who have a long history of supporting Conservatives, a long history of donating to the Conservatives. One of them from my riding, Al Teshuba, actually ran federally for the Conservatives. I'm happy to say he was defeated by my colleague Brian Masse, who's an incredible MP. But this government has rewarded him with an appointment. What we see all too often is that the people that they are appointing at government agencies have no background or qualifications when it comes to the appointment that they are being given.

Again, I go back to how can the people of Ontario, how can my constituents believe that the process they have now worked into, or are working to get into, the justice system of appointing judges is not going to be the same cycle that we're currently seeing with them through government appointments?

Criminal Lawyers' Association vice president Daniel Brown says this bill undermines the independence and risks politicizing the judicial appointments process. That's not us as New Democrats saying that; that is the Criminal Lawyers' Association vice president saying that. Instead of the law society, the Ontario Bar Association and the Federation of Ontario Law Associations having independent choice over representatives, it's now subject to the Attorney General's approval. I go back to the issue that I raised at the beginning: the concerns from within the legal system around giving the Attorney General the opportunity to accept or reject whoever they want to, with the potential of them doing that in an endless cycle until they get somebody who fits their political purpose.

Speaker, I want to jump forward because I know that I have to watch the clock. Although I had 20 minutes, I know that we are running out of time before we go into members' statements. So I'm going to jump forward to some of the concerns that I have heard from my constituents, issues they've had accessing justice prior to this bill coming in, issues that started under the previous Liberal government but have been made exponentially worse due to cuts brought in by this Conservative government.

I have heard from constituents—I'm sure we all have; I know the government members have, too—who are waiting years for a Social Benefits Tribunal hearing, all while continuously being denied access to social assistance. Let's put that into perspective. People in this province with disabilities are being denied access to the income support they need because of the backlog and how slow it's taking to get a hearing at the Social Benefits

Tribunal, and yet this government in this bill is going to make that process even longer—even longer.

Instead of doing what they should be doing, which is increasing social assistance rates for those who are on social assistance and already live in deep poverty, explain to me how someone on \$733 a month who would need access to a lawyer for a Social Benefits Tribunal hearing, or for any other issues, if they want to access a lawyer for any other issue, how they're going to afford that when \$733 a month doesn't even cover their rent? How is someone with a disability who receives \$1,169 a month supposed to be able to cover rent and food and be able to put clothes on their back, purchase the medications that aren't covered under social assistance and still be able to afford a lawyer to represent them at a tribunal hearing or in court? It's not possible.

What this government has done is already taken a very vulnerable, marginalized group and made their living conditions worse for them, and now they're going to deny them access to legal representation. That is what we see throughout this bill. We see that the racialized communities are disproportionately affected, we see women fleeing domestic violence disproportionately represented and affected, we see children disproportionately affected by this—all in a negative way. We see new Canadians, low-income people, people with disabilities who are all negatively impacted. The most vulnerable people in this province are the most negatively impacted by this.

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I know my colleagues have raised this, but it bears repeating: This Conservative government, the Ford Conservative government, slashed legal aid funding by 30%, about \$133 million. You tell me how that increases or accelerates access to justice for low-income people in this province, when you have slashed funding and their access to legal representation—the only legal representation that they can afford. It does not include well-funded and properly administered legal aid, which is widely seen as the bedrock in terms of access to justice; it certainly is on this side of the House. It's not on that side of the House.

In fact, Speaker, it doesn't even mention legal aid in this bill. I suggest or suspect that it doesn't mention legal aid because this government has cut legal aid and they're trying to hide the fact that, almost every step of the way, in every policy they bring forward and every bill they put forward, there is an attack on the most marginalized people in this province: racialized people, low-income people, people with disabilities.

Legal aid has significantly been cut by the Conservative government, which, as I said, disproportionately affects low-income and racialized individuals. Legal Aid Ontario was forced to cut services, and scores of defence counsel were driven out of private practice, leaving an unfilled access-to-justice gap. Now, explain to me, when you are driving lawyers out and there is no one to fill that gap, how that is creating better access to justice for the people who needed those legal aid lawyers.

Speaker, legal aid is an essential service, especially during a pandemic when the government is refusing to

implement an eviction ban. Since the pandemic began, Legal Aid Ontario has approved payments for additional work such as bail hearings and case management meetings that are required as a result of the pandemic. But I want to be clear, under an already reduced budget, legal aid is running out of money. When they do, it will be catastrophic for the most vulnerable, marginalized people in this province.

Speaker, being cognizant of the time and that members' statements are going to begin soon, I just want to say that, every step of the way, this government has said one thing and done another. They've tried their very best to make their deep cuts to our social safety nets, while trying to package it and put a pretty bow on top and say, "Look how progressive we are and look how much we actually care about every person in this province." Yet you take that bow off the top, you open that package up, and it's pretty ugly inside.

To the vulnerable people in this province who are being directly, deeply, negatively impacted by what this government is doing, on their behalf, I say: Shame on you. Shame on you. During a pandemic, especially, we should be working collectively. They like to say that we don't work with them; the reality is, they don't listen to us and they don't listen to the people in this province. But during a pandemic, especially, we should be working as a collective to do everything that we can to lift people up, not to—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but it is time for members' statements. A reminder to all members as they come in to please be respectful of others who have the floor.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FARM EDUCATION

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: For many students, visiting a local farm is a highlight of the school year. But it is a highlight that they had to go without this year.

If you can't bring students to the farm, why not bring the farm to the students? That's exactly what two Perth-Wellington families set out to do.

Amanda Twiss and her husband, James, of Mapletwiss Farm in Damascus, raise chickens, cattle and pigs. Their goal is to open a store on-site and offer customers the chance to see the farm and the animals. But the pandemic forced them to postpone this.

Instead, they have created a YouTube series called Fun Facts and Farm Chats. The project is intended to bring kids closer to the farm and closer to where their food comes from. The videos are based on the elementary-school curriculum. Their 10-year-old son Colton is involved as well, and I'm told he is quite engaged in raising their chickens.

Jess and Ryan Pfisterer, who also farm near Damascus, started Pfisterer Farm School. They also wanted to give young people a way to spend a day on the farm. Their one-minute videos are geared towards grades 1 to 3. Parents and teachers can use them as a resource. They also allow classrooms to “ask a farmer.” Each class can submit up to five questions.

It’s good to see the farm families in Perth–Wellington promoting agriculture and education. We take pride in our world-class farms and agriculture businesses. We grow some of the safest and best-quality food in the world, and I want to thank Mapletwiss Farm and Pfisterer Farm for bringing their farms to the classroom.

FARMERS IN INDIA

Ms. Sara Singh: For months, farmers in India have been peacefully protesting against harmful agricultural reform bills that would have detrimental impacts to their livelihoods. These peaceful protestors, many of them seniors, have been met with brutal violence and have been detained, often illegally. Activists and journalists like Nodeep Kaur and Disha Ravi have been subjected to torture and other abuses by the Indian police.

As a great-granddaughter of a farming family from a rural village in Punjab, I am proud to stand in solidarity with those on the ground in India and around the world and members of the diaspora who continue to raise their voices against these injustices.

I want to thank organizations like KhalsaAid, United Sikhs and the Sikh Motorcycle Club for providing support to those protestors and helping to educate communities about these protests, one of the largest in human history.

I also want to encourage members of this House to also learn more about the protests in India and to understand how they too can raise their voices, because as Dr. King Jr. once said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” We all have a responsibility to raise our voices and stand in solidarity.

To the farmers in India: We are with you. We hear you. We see you. Continue on in solidarity.

PLACES OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

Mr. Rod Phillips: During this difficult year, the people of Ontario have had to appreciate the things that truly matter in their lives. For many Ontarians, including many of my constituents in Ajax, religious faith and worship have been important, vital means to cope with the pandemic. In fact, according to Stats Canada’s national household survey, 75% of Ontarians profess some form of religious faith. In Ajax, that takes the form of 30 places of worship.

Churches, mosques, temples, synagogues and other places of worship have always been integral to the social fabric of our community in Ajax and in Durham region. In addition to worship services, those facilities operate food banks, charities, child care and other supports for the most vulnerable in our community.

Recognizing the crucial role that these religious institutions play in Ajax, like many members of this House, I’ve been working closely and regularly with local faith leaders to provide support and make sure that there is mutual understanding as they face the challenges of operating safely and providing spiritual, emotional and physical health support for our community.

Later this morning, I’m proud that, along with our faith leaders, I’ll be meeting with Dr. Robert Kyle, Durham’s medical officer of health, and Dr. Pepi McTavish, the associate medical officer of health, to talk about safety concerns and ensure that our faith institutions can continue to support our community. Working together with public health officials, we’ll continue to ensure that our places of worship can support Ajax and be a model across our province.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yesterday, the Ford government announced that on March 15, residents can begin booking appointments for COVID-19 vaccines. Frankly, people are upset that they had to wait this long for that information. In Quebec and Alberta, seniors are already able to book their life-saving vaccines. The Premier blames the Prime Minister, yet other Premiers have been able to get vaccines for their residents.

1020

Over 360 people have died in Niagara, and neither the Premier, the Minister of Health or anyone from the Ford government, including the member from Niagara West, has answered the questions the residents of Niagara want to know. So I’ll ask him again: Where exactly were our life-saving Moderna vaccines diverted to, and when can we expect our fair share sent back to Niagara?

Appointments don’t mean anything if residents in Niagara can’t actually get the vaccine. The vaccine is the only way we can safely end the Premier’s cycle of shut-downs and infections. This Premier has failed the people of Niagara when it comes to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. The residents of Niagara are owed answers and their fair share of vaccines. The people of Niagara deserve to know if the COVID-19 vaccines they were promised and are now owed will actually be available for them when the vaccine hotline opens. And again, I’ll repeat: 360 people have died in Niagara of COVID-19, most in long-term-care and retirement homes.

HEART MONTH

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: We’ve just come to the end of February, which is Heart Month. COVID-19 has an impact on heart health in many ways. People with heart conditions can be vulnerable to more severe outcomes, and COVID may also cause damage to the hearts and vascular system of previously healthy individuals.

The pandemic may be discouraging some people experiencing heart disease or stroke in Ontario from seeking medical care. But this month, Heart Month, is a

good reminder that our hospitals and health care providers are doing everything they can to keep patients safe. It is a reminder that the risks of ignoring symptoms of heart conditions or stroke are far greater than the risk of seeking medical care you need, and it's a reminder to make sure to keep your scheduled medical appointments and let your health care practitioner know if you're experiencing any changes in your health, because every minute counts—and as the team at RVH reminds me, time is muscle. If you experience symptoms or you know someone who is having symptoms of a stroke or heart attack, please call 911 right away.

To mark heart health this month, I joined MPP Doug Downey, who invited me to join the heart-and-stroke month challenge by jumping rope for heart and stroke. I challenged Councillor Natalie Harris to do the same. This campaign will help the Heart and Stroke Foundation continue to make a difference in the heart health of all Canadians.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning. Ontarians are waking up today to news that our province is not ready to deliver the COVID-19 vaccine and that there will be even more delays. Seniors over 80 won't be able to book an appointment until March 15. Those in the 60-to-65 group, still at high risk, will have to wait until Canada Day. Essential workers are still waiting for cabinet to decide when they will get the shot, and while this government hasn't even shared details about how people will be able to sign up, in Quebec and Alberta today, people are able to call or go online to set up their appointments.

We are in a race against time. Faster-spreading variants are taking hold now. We learned today that kids and staff at schools in my riding have been exposed to the variants. I spoke with a public health nurse yesterday here in Toronto who told me they are very, very afraid.

My constituents, good people like Linda Grobovsky, who I spoke with just minutes ago, are wondering what this government has been waiting for. Essential workers, seniors, small businesses cannot afford another make-it-up-as-you-go plan from this government. When will the Premier stop idling and shift this vital immunization campaign into high gear so we can save lives?

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} Lucille Collard: La semaine dernière, le gouvernement fédéral a annoncé son plan pour moderniser et renforcer la loi sur les langues officielles, un plan qui vise à protéger et renforcer la langue française partout au pays. Pour les francophones et francophiles, ce plan est un pas extrêmement important. Cependant, c'est aussi un rappel pour ce qu'il reste à faire au niveau provincial.

Les francophones dans l'Ontario ont le droit d'obtenir les services essentiels en français. Que ce soit en matières de justice, de santé, en éducation, ces services sont vitaux pour nos communautés.

Dans ma circonscription d'Ottawa–Vanier et à Ottawa, nous sommes privilégiés d'avoir plusieurs institutions francophones. Je pense à l'Hôpital Montfort, qui offre aux francophones un endroit sûr où aller lorsqu'ils ont besoin de services de santé dans leur langue maternelle. Je pense également à nos conseils scolaires qui travaillent d'arrache-pied pour assurer une éducation française de qualité à tous nos enfants. L'Université d'Ottawa et La Cité collégiale rendent l'éducation postsecondaire plus accessible aux francophones et francophiles du Canada et d'ailleurs.

Ces services en français existent grâce au travail incroyable et déterminé de militants francophones, mais ils ne devraient pas avoir à se battre si durement. Et il demeure que la plupart des régions en Ontario n'ont pas encore accès à ces services de façon équitable.

Le gouvernement de l'Ontario a fait certain progrès pour reconnaître l'importance de la place de la francophonie en Ontario, notamment avec la proclamation du drapeau franco-ontarien comme symbole officiel et récemment avec le projet de loi sur l'accès à la justice, qui permettrait de déposer des documents et obtenir des décisions judiciaires en français partout en province. Je trouve important de reconnaître ces gains et j'invite le gouvernement à poursuivre sur cette lancée. Travaillons ensemble pour rendre notre province plus accessible.

COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Well, everyone, if you hadn't noticed, it's getting kind of cold outside. It may be time to get those thick winter jackets out, those warm Canadian mittens and that nice wool toque that grandma knitted for you last Christmas—you know, the one that you haven't had the chance to wear yet. But you want to make sure that you're all prepared and bundled up for whatever the weather may bring.

But sadly, this might not be the case for everyone. As the weather gets extremely cold, many are left to fend for themselves on the streets, using whatever they can to keep themselves warm at night. Shelters are quickly reaching capacity as less fortunate people must line up early to get a warm spot to stay.

Chatham-Kent sees that struggle, and I stand here today to proudly talk about an event that made a difference in my hometown. On Saturday, February 20, NeighbourLink Chatham-Kent hosted the 2021 Coldest Night of the Year walk. In total, 21 teams and 135 walkers, to which I was the captain of our office's team, set out to walk the usual five-kilometre route, following COVID-19 guidelines, to raise money and awareness for charities serving people experiencing homelessness.

I am pleased to announce that we raised over \$49,000, which surpassed their initial goal of \$30,000. This money can now be used towards NeighbourLink Chatham-Kent's exciting initiatives to help provide free-of-charge food and transportation to local residents.

Even though the walk was on Saturday, anyone can still donate today by visiting the Coldest Night of the Year website.

FOREIGN-TRAINED DOCTORS

Ms. Doly Begum: Earlier this month, I met a young woman who is a trained doctor. She emigrated to Canada with a medical degree and since has faced immense obstacles, unable to practise as a doctor.

When the world was opening the doors for foreign-trained doctors during the COVID-19 pandemic, she and many other IMGs—international medical graduates—took the initiative to register so they could serve the people of Ontario on the front lines alongside other doctors, but were not able to do anything other than volunteer.

This young woman and her colleagues have been facing barrier after barrier while trying to find a way to work as physicians in Ontario. IMGs and foreign-trained physicians work day and night to complete their qualification exams, but the current system makes it almost impossible for them to achieve any validated experience that will take them to the next step.

This is not an isolated story. Many highly qualified and educated professionals come to Canada in search of better opportunities, for a better life and for the future of their children. Yet systemic barriers make it almost impossible to find work in their fields, and they end up working minimum-wage jobs despite working on the front lines, serving our communities.

Ontario is home to many immigrants and refugees who have settled here. We take pride in our diversity and our multiculturalism. Our government must work together to build a comprehensive strategy to support foreign-trained workers across all fields and ensure that we're preventing brain drain and deskilling among immigrant communities across Ontario.

1030

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Mr. David Piccini: I was made aware of a truly remarkable story from my riding of a group of volunteers who are going above and beyond to make ensure people have a place to skate.

In today's difficult times, places to go to get fresh air and exercise are so important. In Castleton, volunteers have set up three ice surfaces and a crokicurl rink for kids and families to skate on at the Castleton Sports Club. Many volunteers have made this possible, but I'd like to give a special shout-out to Jeff Turney, Stacy King and Bruce Bond, who routinely visit the rinks in the early morning, mid-afternoon and evening to make sure that the ice is okay and that there is flooding and maintenance of the rinks.

Community rinks like these are essential to life in rural Ontario. These volunteers arrive sometimes as early as 5:30 in the morning, putting countless hours in. The community sees the work they do and we honour it. There have been no issues at the rink. Folks respect distancing regulations, and the last one out turns out the lights. That's the way we do it in small-town Ontario.

The rinks are located just beside Northumberland Hills Public School. Kids come to skate after school. It's been

going on for so long now that the older kids help the younger kids lace up their skates and provide pucks to play some pickup, and all is done while safely respecting public health guidelines.

The rinks are located, as I said, at Castleton Sports Club, a not-for-profit charity. I would like to thank all the volunteers, especially Jeff, Stacy and Bruce. Thank you for what you do for our community every day. We honour you; we appreciate you.

COVID-19 DEATHS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition has a point of order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent for the House to observe a moment of silence to pay tribute to the 120 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 over the past week.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Leader of the Opposition is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence to pay tribute to the 120 Ontarians who have succumbed to COVID-19 over the past week. Agreed? Agreed.

Members will please rise.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Members may take their seats.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West has a point of order.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion regarding the accelerated passage of Bill 239, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, to help in the fight against COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London West is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion regarding the accelerated passage of Bill 239, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, to help in the fight against COVID-19. Agreed? I heard a no.

It is now time for oral questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question today is for the Premier. Speaker, when families were losing their loved ones to COVID-19 in long-term care, the Premier promised that they would get the answers they deserve through a commission that the government established. That commission heard from Dr. Williams on Monday.

Two days before his appearance, the commission received 217,000 documents and 2,000 pages of handwritten notes from Dr. Williams—two days before his testimony. The notes were heavily redacted and Dr. Williams's testimony was interfered with constantly by his lawyers, who were trying to, I guess, protect Dr. Williams from providing the information that people deserve.

If the government and the Premier really wanted to get the answers for Ontarians, if they really respected them, why does this look like a stinking cover-up?

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdraw, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The question has been placed.

Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Speaker. In fact, I would say to the Leader of the Opposition, quite the opposite: We set up and allowed the commission to operate because I know there are many families that have inquiries. They were wondering what happened during the course of the COVID situation thus far. They want the answers, and we want them to have the answers.

This is a truly independent commission that is doing its work. Dr. Williams did appear before the commission. However, there were some concerns with respect to some of the entries in some of his documents related to a cabinet decision that it was the impression of counsel that they needed to be protected and not released. However, the matter did go before a mediation. It was determined that all of Dr. Williams's documents should be submitted, and they were.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, unfortunately, Ontarians are going to keep wondering what really went wrong with the government's response to COVID-19 in long-term care, because this commission is not getting the information in a timely fashion that they deserve. They were promised all information would be available. That's what the Premier promised. The Premier, instead, dumped 217,000 documents on the commission a couple of days before Dr. Williams's testimony. His notes have been heavily redacted. Lawyers have intervened at every moment of Dr. Williams's testimony. Why is this government trying to prevent this commission from doing the job that Ontarians want and need them to do?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Well, in fact, the commission has been provided with the documents. Dr. Williams's documents were not heavily redacted; they were provided in full. Dr. Williams provided his evidence. He has answered all of their questions. We have provided all of the documents the commission has requested.

Yes, there are 217,000 documents, because a lot has happened in the last year, as we've been dealing with COVID-19, across very many areas, and so that is something I know the commission is dealing with. But the reality is, we didn't sit on our hands in dealing with it. We took action on a number of fronts. There are many documents, and they have all been produced.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Everybody in Ontario has watched as this government has stonewalled this commission, not providing documents in a timely fashion, and

now 217,000 documents all of a sudden being dumped on the commission, and the government refuses to expand the length of time this commission has to do its work. It is absolutely shameful. In fact, one of the commission lawyers said this: "It is a gargantuan task, almost impossible" to get through all those documents.

Redacted notes from Dr. Williams, lawyers surrounding Dr. Williams not giving the commission the opportunity to properly question him: What is this government trying to hide from the people of Ontario?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Speaker. Our government has been absolutely open and transparent with the people of Ontario since the day this pandemic started.

Dr. Williams was given free rein to say whatever he wanted to say—and he did—in front of the commission. He produced all of his documents. His documents were produced not redacted. The commission has all of the information they need. Documents were presented quickly to the commission.

There is a large volume of documents to deal with because a lot, as I said before, has been done. But we have been open and transparent. We have nothing to hide. We have had frequent representations by Dr. Williams and/or Dr. Yaffe before the public and before the media twice a week. We have press conferences where Dr. Williams also appears. We have modelling that's presented by Dr. Brown and Dr. Sander. We have dashboards that we produce to the public on a regular basis, online.

We are producing everything that we have—

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

The next question? Once again, the Leader of the Opposition.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier, but I do have to say the only way that they can pull the knife out of the back of Ontarians is by extending the commission's time frame and allowing them to do their work.

But now I want to talk about yesterday, when we saw the Premier—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw that comment.

1040

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdraw.

Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about yesterday. As seniors in our province are anxiously awaiting their chance to get a vaccine, the Premier stood in his place yesterday and suggested that somehow we're leading the country when it comes to vaccinations. I can tell you that that information is not actually accurate.

In fact, today we see the Quebec portal opening, and seniors are registering for their vaccines. In Alberta, of course, their portal opened yesterday: 25,000 Albertans were provided an appointment, and they're getting their vaccines come next week.

In fact, the information the Premier provided is not accurate. We're actually seventh out of all the provinces when it comes to the vaccine rollout.

My question to the Premier is: Is he prepared to correct his record, give the people of Ontario the respect that they deserve—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. To reply, the Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: I know the challenges when it comes to math with the NDP, but there are a million tests altogether; we've done 600,000. I think everyone that can do math on this side—that's 60%. We have 38% of the population.

I love how they compare it to other provinces here. First of all, I love the Premier of Alberta, Jason Kenney. He's working his back off. They have four and a half million—

Interjections.

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

Restart the clock. The Premier can conclude his—

Hon. Doug Ford: They have a population of four and a half million. We saw what happened out there: The system crashed. Now my great friend, François Legault, who is one of the best Premiers out there—they haven't even done one single second dose. We've done over 250,000 second doses.

We are leading the country in vaccinations. But, Mr. Speaker, we're focusing on the most vulnerable: the long-term-care patients, the seniors, the hard-working health care workers that are out there. We have to get them vaccinated first.

Do you know what the problem is, Mr. Speaker? We need the vaccines. That's—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, across our country, it's a race: The race is on between vaccines and variants, and in our province, the variants are winning. That is something that is really troubling to the seniors of our province.

In fact, when our vaccines are being slow-walked out the door when the government can't seem to get it together, here is what Dr. Samir Sinha says: "With variants of concern that are circulating around and becoming the dominant strain, we're really worried that we're going to lose a lot more older people along the way."

Does the government actually have any information about the number of seniors whose lives are at risk because this government has delayed the rollout of the vaccines until the middle of March?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker, thank goodness our government took action when it came to the airports, where the variants were coming in by the truckload. If it wasn't for us, there would be more variants. So thank goodness we stood up the testing at the airports and we made sure we worked hand-in-hand with the federal government, which we appreciate.

But again, Mr. Speaker, when you don't have any ammunition, you can't go to war. The ammunition is the

vaccine. We need the vaccines. As soon as we get more vaccines, we'll make sure that we get people vaccinated. We'll start with 80-plus, which some areas are going to be starting because of the great leadership in the public health units.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, here's what matters to Ontarians. We have the highest number of COVID cases right now: 10,500. Ontario has the second-highest number of deaths across the country: 6,893. And of course, tragically, 3,739 of those deaths were in long-term care.

Here's the problem: 96% of COVID deaths are happening with people who—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Please stop the clock. Come on.

Restart the clock. The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ninety-six per cent of COVID deaths are with people over the age of 60. They are the most at risk of catching COVID-19 in the third wave. The variants are here.

The question to the Premier is, with the COVID-19 variants amongst us, with the fact that the Premier has reopened this province too quickly, with the fact that the vaccines have been delayed so egregiously, how is this government going to make sure that people get the vaccine they need? Does he have a backup plan to ensure that people have the vaccines?

Hon. Doug Ford: Thank you for the question. Through you, Mr. Speaker: Those are some numbers from that side. Now, I'm going to tell you the real numbers here.

The real numbers are, we're leading North America—any jurisdiction our size—with the lowest cases per 100,000. We're leading Canada, with the exception of the small Maritime provinces, in the lowest cases. I'll read them out once again: Per 100,000 people, Ontario is at 68. Those are staggering numbers—68. Canada's average is 80. My great pal over in Saskatchewan—it's 121 compared to our 68. Alberta, which you were talking about, is 103 compared to our 68. Quebec is 93 compared to our 68. BC is 92. Manitoba is 87. Our great friends out there in Newfoundland—they're doing very well considering the outbreak. They're at 67.

Again, Mr. Speaker, outside of the smaller Maritime provinces, we are leading North America in every category, from testing to vaccinations. We are the leaders here in Ontario because of the great work we're doing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Opposition, come to order.

The next question.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Ms. Sara Singh: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, the Premier told personal support workers in Ontario that he really hoped he could

give them a raise, but that at the end of the day these things are just simply not up to him.

Well, PSWs in communities like Brampton are wondering when they're going to see a permanent pay increase. Speaker, if the Premier is not the one in charge, who is?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: For the first time in Canadian history, we are hiring 8,200 PSWs. For the first jurisdiction in North America, we're going to have four hours of care. For the first time, we're seeing rapid builds. We're building thousands of beds. Compared to the Liberals—I think it was 600 they barely scraped by in 15 years. We're doing more in a month than they were doing in 15 years.

We're going to continue building long-term care. We're going to make sure we enhance long-term care and improve the disaster we inherited from both the NDP and the Liberals. And we're going to end up hiring a total of 27,000 PSWs and nurses to fix the problem we inherited.

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

Ms. Sara Singh: Speaker, through you to the Premier: Hiring them is one part of the solution. There is a retention issue because these are precariously low-paid employees. So if we don't address that, we're going to see this issue continue on in the sector.

Yesterday, the Premier also said that he is being lobbied every single day by PSWs who are asking him to keep his promise and follow through with the raises that they've been promised for almost over a year now, but he still continues to say that's not up to him.

Again, to the Premier, since you're clearly not the one making the decisions over there, who is? And when are these PSWs going to get the permanent pay raise they deserve?

Hon. Doug Ford: Actually, through you, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to correct that statement, if I can. I'll be lobbying everyone on this side. Yes, it's up to us, but guess what? For 15 years, they were underpaid. They never got a raise until we stepped up to the plate and gave them a \$3-an-hour pay increase. We will keep that \$3—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The opposition has to come to order.

Premier, conclude.

Hon. Doug Ford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were the ones—after years of neglect, decades of neglect, we're the government that stood up and we're giving them a \$3-an-hour pay increase. And we will keep that: We will make sure they are properly paid until we can attract more people to this great profession.

They're absolute heroes. I backed those PSWs—and they all know it—from day one. Maybe the Leader of the Opposition might want to visit one of these long-term-care homes and see the reaction I get from the PSWs and the nurses when I go in there. I love them and they love us.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Since certain members are completely ignoring my requests to come to

order, as if I wasn't standing here at all, completely ignoring what I'm saying, we're going to move to warnings.

The next question.

NATURAL GAS PIPELINE

Mr. Robert Bailey: Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: Premier, I am once again honoured to rise in the Legislature to speak to you about an important topic to my constituents—and to all Ontarians, in fact—the future of line 5.

The impact of a line 5 shutdown would be truly devastating not only for Ontario, but for Michigan, Ohio and Illinois as well as Quebec. A line 5 shutdown puts at least 15% of northwest Ohio's fuel supply at risk as well as more than half of the jet fuel supply for the Detroit Metro Airport. Line 5 supplies 65% of the propane demand in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and 55% of Michigan's state-wide propane needs. The light crude transported by line 5 feeds refineries in the upper Midwest and in eastern Canada.

1050

Speaker, can the Premier please share with my constituents and the House the importance of the Ontario-Michigan partnership and the need to continue to work together on line 5 and energy infrastructure projects on both sides of this border?

Hon. Doug Ford: I want to thank our great member from Sarnia-Lambton for continuing to fight on the line 5 issue.

I first want to take the opportunity to highlight the positive aspects regarding our relationship with Michigan economically, and the energy sector as well. Michigan is Ontario's largest export market in the US and the largest source of imports, Mr. Speaker. It is Ontario's largest two-way trading partner in the US, with \$82.3 billion in total two-way trade. Close to 600,000 jobs in Michigan depend on trade and investment with Canada.

Michigan continues to be a major importer of Ontario electricity. These are big numbers here: In 2020, close to half of Ontario's energy exports were sent to Michigan. That's 9,835 gigawatts compared to what we received off them, only 26 gigawatts, so it's good that we're exporting our energy down there.

But, Mr. Speaker—

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: My supplementary question is back to the Premier as well. Premier, as we have discussed, Enbridge's line 5 crossing at the Mackinac Straits is a line which has been in service without leaking since 1953. That is a track record of success and responsibility by everyone involved. For more than 65 years, line 5 has delivered light oil and natural gas liquids that heat homes and business, fuel vehicles and power industry in the Great Lakes states.

In May 2016, during the Obama administration, the United States Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, the federal regulator in charge of pipeline safety, commissioned an extensive safety review that

found no serious problems with this operation. In June 2020, a follow-up report concluded that a reported displaced anchor placed no threat to the pipeline. If people know about these enhanced measures, would anyone favour a total cessation of line 5 activities as opposed to, say, fortifying potential weak points to further reduce the risk of a leak?

Speaker, can the Premier please share what impact the decision of closing line 5 would have on the working people in my riding and in the Great Lakes states, Quebec and Ontario?

Hon. Doug Ford: Again, I would like to thank the member. The member is 100% right, Mr. Speaker, about the negative impacts this decision will have on the working people of Ontario and Michigan.

James Williamson, a steamfitter in Sarnia, said that the pipeline's potential closure could impact workplaces like his. It would essentially shut down not only his work but all the reciprocal jobs around the region. He also mentioned that three of his brothers also work in the petrochemical industry and would be out of jobs on line 5 if it's shut down, Mr. Speaker: "It would require us to travel and move our families"—lift their families up and move them out of the region—"to maintain ... income."

Do you know what's amazing, Mr. Speaker? Never in the history of this province has the pendulum ever swung so far. We now are the representatives of the hard-working private sector unions. And thanks to the Minister of Labour, the relationship he's built up with the steelworkers, the steamfitters, the drywallers—

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is for the Premier. There are multiple serious outbreaks in Thunder Bay schools. Four, so far, are now shifting back to virtual learning. Lakehead board trustees have voted to ask for all schools to go virtual. Teachers, education workers and many others have done everything they can, but the situation is getting worse by the day.

Unfortunately, our warnings and suggestions have been ignored—things like capping class size and more testing. When is this government going to start listening so we can keep Thunder Bay students safe and in school?

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

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, there is a high rate of community transmission taking place within the community. We are going to follow the public health advice, the medical officer of health's recommendation when it comes to keeping schools open. That is the mission of the government.

But as we have said since before school reopened in September—I think what is the consensus, I'd hope, in this House—the risks within our community are reflected within our schools. It actually underscores the imperative

of keeping transmission down and keeping our guard up as a province as we deal with variants of concern.

In the context of Thunder Bay, we have deployed additional investment—over \$5 million for that board alone—in the context of COVID: for more hiring, for more staffing, for more cleaning. We've also mandated masking down to grade 1, requiring a stricter protocol before a child enters a school, and likewise the staff in the context of their screening. And, obviously, asymptomatic testing is expanded and accessible within schools right across the north, including in Thunder Bay, as we speak.

We'll continue to be informed by the best medical advice to keep students safe and our staff safe, and keep the community rates down so that we can keep our schools open.

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

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My question is, again, for the Premier. I'm glad the minister mentioned community spread, because Thunder Bay advised this government a month ago that there is a state of emergency when it comes to COVID, but this government's lack of investment continues even to this day. This ignoring of the urgency in Thunder Bay affects all of northern Ontario. When the Thunder Bay Jail had an outbreak, there was a very late response. This government failed.

I have advised this government again and again about the limited capacity of our health care systems to handle this kind of crisis. Now, as my caucus colleague the member from Kiiwetinoong has said, the COVID outbreak in Thunder Bay is threatening the people of Neskantaga, who are battling crisis after crisis.

What is this government doing for the people of Thunder Bay? This is an emergency. Why are we dragging our feet?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can certainly assure the member opposite that we are watching the situation in Thunder Bay very carefully. We are aware that there is significant community transmission. We have put extra resources there. In fact, we've put in over 20 more assigned provincial case managers and contact tracers. We are receiving the tests in accurate time frames; in 97% of cases, we receive the reports back within 24 hours.

We have already invested over \$2.7 million to the Thunder Bay hospital to create 30 more beds, and we are watching the situation very carefully now. As a matter of fact, I spoke with Dr. Williams about it yesterday, who is in regular contact with Dr. DeMille, the local public health manager, and that is something where we are receiving recommendations from Dr. Williams tomorrow upon receipt of data tonight, to determine where it needs to be placed and whether the emergency brake needs to be applied there or what else should happen. So we are watching the situation very, very carefully and supplying extra resources to help Thunder Bay deal with the situation.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Mr. Roman Baber: My question is to the Premier. For a year, the government is saying that it is listening to the experts. It isn't. Speaking to practising doctors off the record, the majority will tell you that broad lockdowns are medical insanity. Focused protection is what's needed. Instead, the government is listening to public health career politicians; public health doctors driven by ideology; bureaucrats, many of whom have not seen a live patient in decades, pretending that they fully understand the predicament we're in; the same people who try to prevent the consumption of sugary drinks, now with unlimited power, believing that they can reorder humankind, ruining millions of lives with impunity, with deadly implications.

My question to the Premier: By now, the Premier cannot deny that the lockdowns are deadly. Health, mental health, isolation, desperation, devastation—he knows it. Everyone in this House knows it. So if it isn't about politics, if the health and safety of Ontarians is his first priority, and since we now know that lockdowns are deadly, then why are we still in lockdown?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the question really speaks for itself. We'll continue to listen to the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health of the province of Ontario and those of the medical officers of health in the 34 public health units across the province. We actually, unlike the member opposite, value their opinion. We value the hard work of our medical professionals. Be it the nurses, PSWs or our doctors, they've done a great job, and we'll continue to follow their advice.

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

Mr. Roman Baber: Speaker, the government House leader is talking about public health experts, but how about privately, or in open letters in the Post in May or in the Star in early June or in the Globe in July and then in the Sun in November, where dozens of practising doctors wrote to the Premier, publicly begging for a balanced approach?

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How does the Premier not hear the suffering of millions of people? Why is he tone-deaf, especially now that everyday Ontarians are no longer afraid to speak, no longer afraid of the politically correct mob, or afraid to say that the lockdown is deadly? Can the Premier hear the millions of Ontarians pleading for some sort of normalcy, pleading to let their kids be kids again, pleading that he lets them work again? Now that we can all admit how deadly the lockdown is, why isn't he listening? Why is he continuing to imprison us? Is it because of politics? Is it because ending the lockdown now would amount to a devastating admission that everything he knowingly did since the summer was a deadly mistake?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Mr. Speaker, this is a member of the opposition who voted in favour of every single initiative that this government brought in with

respect to battling the COVID pandemic, in March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November and December. He, in the opposition, supported every single one of those measures.

Unlike the member opposite, we value the work of our health care professionals, and we'll continue to be guided by them. That is why we've had the results that we have in the province. We are not going to let up fighting COVID-19 and keeping the people of the province of Ontario safe.

NATURAL GAS PIPELINE

Mr. Robert Bailey: Speaker, through you and to Associate Minister Walker: I know that our government is working around the clock to help our economy recover from the unprecedented impacts of COVID-19. As public health units across this province transition back to the COVID-19 response framework, more Ontarians are going back to work.

Unfortunately, tens of thousands of workers in my riding and across this province face uncertainty because of a decision made by the Governor of Michigan to threaten to shut down Enbridge's line 5 pipeline. Can the Associate Minister of Energy please tell this House what this government is doing to defend these energy jobs in my riding and across this province?

Hon. Bill Walker: I want to thank the hard-working member from Sarnia-Lambton for that important question and for his leadership on this critical file.

Last week, our government heard from concerned stakeholders in the Sarnia-Lambton area during a round table discussion about the potential impacts of the line 5 closure. One of them, Ross Tius from Local 663 of the plumbers, pipefitters and welders union, told us, "The lifestyle of Local 663's members would be drastically changed. On average, this industry and its construction partners put \$300 million to \$500 million per year into the local economy. With Nova Chemical's \$2-billion investment here," line 5 is critical "to keeping this Sarnia-Lambton community going."

Mr. Speaker, as the hard-working member from Sarnia-Lambton said, 30,000 Ontarians and their families depend on the continued safe operation of this pipeline. I'm proud that our government, under Premier Ford's leadership, is fighting them every step of the way.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Sarnia-Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I appreciate the minister's and this government's efforts to support the hard-working people of my community.

Mr. Speaker, line 5 is absolutely critical to our local economy and also critical to the energy security of our province and this country. Preventing this shutdown requires a Team Canada and, in fact, a Team North America approach. I'm grateful that the Premier and ministers have been working with the federal government and with our neighbours across the border to resolve this issue. Could

the minister further expand and tell us how important it is for us to be in this together?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you again for the question from the great member from Sarnia, Mr. Bob Bailey.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Sarnia is absolutely right. For our government, the line 5 issue is above politics. It's all about people. If the Governor's decision to shut down line 5 stands, it's not just the people of Sarnia-Lambton who will feel the impact. People and businesses across Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and Michigan itself, Mr. Speaker, will suffer. That is why we all need to be working together.

I hope that the official opposition will join us in expressing their support for the many unionized jobs and the non-unionized jobs that will be lost as a result of this decision. I encourage them to join us in speaking up for those workers in today's take-note debate. But regardless, I want to assure the member that even if they don't, we will continue to do so on this side of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll remind members to refer to each other by their riding name or their ministerial title.

The next question.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier. Agnes von Mehren lives at 103 Avenue Road, in a building owned by corporate landlord Hollyburn. In the last five years, tenants at 103 Avenue have had to pay for two above-guideline rent increases. And now, this corporate landlord has applied for another 11.3% increase, largely for cosmetic renovations that not one renter asked for.

Many low-income tenants live in this building, including seniors who are on fixed incomes. They fear they will be forced out of their homes and will have to struggle to find another affordable place to live, in the most expensive city in Canada, in the middle of a pandemic.

The tenants at 103 Avenue Road want to know: What is this government's plan to stop unfair rent hikes in the middle of a pandemic?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member from Milton.

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for that question.

Mr. Speaker, since the very beginning of COVID-19, our government has called on landlords and tenants to come together and be reasonable with each other, and landlords and tenants across the province have shown the Ontario spirit by doing just that.

In that spirit, our government is stabilizing rents for Ontario's 1.7 million rental households, so the vast majority of families won't see a rent increase this year.

We thank the many landlords and tenants who have been co-operating throughout this challenging time.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Back to the Premier: Today's report from RenovictionsTO found that above-guideline-increase applications have gone up 250% in the last six years, and

over 84% of these applications are made by corporate landlords intent on maximizing their profit.

Many renters across Ontario are already having a very hard time paying rent because they have lost their job, through no fault of their own, during COVID-19.

Continuing to allow massive rent increases in a pandemic will result in economic evictions. It will force people to crash with friends, to look for another home or even risk homelessness. This will increase the spread of COVID-19, and it will lead to more preventable deaths.

When will this government start helping struggling renters instead of corporate landlords intent on making a profit in the middle of a pandemic?

Mr. Parm Gill: From the onset of COVID-19, our government has introduced a number of measures to protect and support tenants, and any suggestion otherwise is completely false.

Last summer, we passed the Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, which mandates the Landlord and Tenant Board, LTB, to consider whether a landlord attempted to negotiate a repayment agreement with tenants before resorting to an eviction for non-payment of rent during COVID-19. This measure promotes repayment agreements over evictions for non-payment of rent, and aims to maintain tenancies.

Last October, we introduced a rent freeze, so the vast majority of Ontario's 1.7 million tenants will not see a rent increase in 2021. This is in effect from January to December of this year.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Ma question, en français, est pour le ministre de l'Éducation. En juin de l'année dernière, la Cour suprême du Canada a affirmé que le droit à l'éducation en français est protégé par la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés. Pourtant, une pénurie d'enseignants francophones persiste dans toute la province, et les élèves ne reçoivent pas l'éducation en français à laquelle ils ont droit.

La situation demeure urgente, et avec l'arrivée de la pandémie, le contexte demeure difficile, mais ça s'est maintenant transformé en crise.

En septembre, le gouvernement a annoncé qu'il s'efforcera d'augmenter le nombre d'enseignants de langue française dans la province. Alors ma question c'est, est-ce que le ministre peut fournir une mise à jour sur ce qui a été fait depuis ce temps, et comment cela a aidé à atténuer la pénurie d'enseignants?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate the question from the member opposite—appreciating that the challenge of French-language educators has been with the province for well over a decade, but this government has resolved to fix it. That's why, through negotiations with the teacher unions and AEFO, the French teachers' union, we agreed to create a working group of boards, of the union, of the Ministry of Education. That group has concluded their work. I've just received a report, which provides a series

of recommendations on how we can strengthen the hiring, both from the retention of French-language educators in the province of Ontario—the recruitment of them, both internationally and domestically, through the various colleges of education in the province of Ontario. We know this is an issue. It's a multi-pronged approach, working in collaboration with the Minister of Francophone Affairs, as well as the Minister of Colleges and Universities, to incent more individuals to teach within our schools. We're very proud when it comes to the funding of French-language education. It's the highest levels ever recorded in Ontario history under this government, and that will continue under Premier Doug Ford.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Les conseils de langue française auront besoin de plusieurs centaines d'enseignants supplémentaires dans les prochaines années. Les associations des conseils scolaires ont sonné l'alarme ce mois-ci. L'évolution des écoles de langue française en Ontario est une histoire à succès, mais le gouvernement doit s'assurer que l'Ontario certifie assez d'enseignants et d'enseignantes pour répondre à la croissance. Cette croissance est impressionnante parce qu'il y a beaucoup d'élèves qui choisissent l'éducation de langue française. Ce sont près de 110 000 élèves et leurs familles qui sont à risque si le gouvernement ne répond pas à cette situation. Il faut absolument accélérer le travail.

Le groupe de travail que le ministre a mentionné a effectivement déposé son rapport avec des recommandations pour répondre à la demande à l'échelle provinciale, aux besoins actuels et futurs. Est-ce que le gouvernement s'engage à fournir le soutien financier nécessaire pour la mise en oeuvre de ces recommandations?

L'hon. Stephen Lecce: Nous allons continuer notre travail avec nos partenaires francophones de l'Ontario.

We very much appreciate the necessity to continue to support French-language education. The member is right: We do see growth; 2020-21 estimates 1.6% enrolment growth for French-language education, which I think underscores the valued proposition that French-language education has offered to the province. They've really been ahead of the curve when it comes to digital pedagogy, online learning and quality education. We're proud of that. It's why this government increased investments in French-language education by 4%, the largest increase noted to date in the province. It's also why we convened the working group.

Now, I assure the member, who I know in good faith is very committed and very concerned about the matter, that we will be able to hire more French-language educators, working with our international partners. The parliamentary assistant and I have met with a variety of consuls general internationally to understand how we can create a pipeline of recruitment to fix this problem once and for all and ensure French-language students have access to quality teachers in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question, the member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

NATURAL GAS PIPELINE

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a three-peat.

Thank you, Speaker, and thank you for acknowledging me. This question is to the Associate Minister of Energy.

Last week, several US states were forced to declare states of emergency in the midst of this winter's cold snap. For example, the governor of Michigan declared a state of emergency on February 22, citing—get this—a propane shortage. Similar propane shortages in 2014 resulted in widespread price-gouging and safety concerns, both in this province and in Michigan. But the governor's decision to shut down the line 5 pipeline can only make things worse. Many Ontarians in rural areas rely on propane to heat their homes in the winter and dry their crops in the summer.

Can the associate minister please assure this House that ensuring energy security for this province and Michigan is the top of mind for our government?

Hon. Bill Walker: I want to thank the member for Sarnia–Lambton, aka PMB Bob, for the question and his great leadership on this very critical, important file.

Members may not know that line 5 supplies all of the feedstock to the Plains Midstream facility in Sarnia. Shutting down line 5 would shut down that critical facility, as well as the Plains facilities in Michigan, leading to price hikes and massive propane and butane shortages on both sides of the border.

We want to avoid this potential crisis, and this is one of the key reasons that our government has been so focused on this issue. We continue to meet with industry stakeholders, union leaders, representatives from the state of Michigan and others to advocate for the continued safe operation of Enbridge's line 5 pipeline.

I can assure the member from Sarnia–Lambton that protecting our energy security is top of mind and that we will never stop fighting for the hard-working people of Ontario.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you to the associate minister for that.

Mr. Speaker, the minister mentioned that the closure of line 5 would lead to supply issues that would result in everyday Ontarians paying more for home heating oil, more for gas in their cars and more at the grocery store for groceries delivered by truck.

Can the associate minister please tell us more about the specific ways in which a line 5 closure would negatively impact affordability for Ontarians?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you again to the hard-working member. Without a shadow of doubt, I can assure him that we will do everything in our power.

Propane is only one of the products produced in Sarnia's refineries that Ontarians use every single day.

Line 5 provides raw fuel to Sarnia's refineries, which produce gasoline, diesel, jet fuel, plastics and chemicals. In fact, line 5 delivers 53% of Ontario's crude oil supply and two thirds of Quebec's oil supply.

When Ontario businesses are forced to absorb increased costs for products like gasoline, these costs are passed on to the consumer. This is unacceptable. Hundreds of thousands of families are already dealing with the negative economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of line 5 would deepen these negative economic impacts and would be felt in every corner of the province and, frankly, across our great country.

Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to fight for our energy workers and Ontario families by defending the continued safe operation of the line 5 pipeline.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Doly Begum: Doctors have called Scarborough ground zero for COVID-19. Scarborough is home to many front-line essential workers, many of whom are low-income, racialized and facing increased risk of COVID due to the nature of their work. Constituents are writing to us every day, worried about the government's slow and confusing vaccine rollout.

Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that doctors have the ability in Scarborough to administer thousands of vaccines per day, due to the lack of supplies they are not able to. Why has this government not allocated an equitable amount of vaccines to hard-hit regions like Scarborough?

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

Hon. Christine Elliott: As the member opposite knows very well, there have been limitations in the supplies of both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines over the last several weeks that have in fact slowed down somewhat our vaccination efforts, but we're ready to go as soon as we receive them. We're ready to go in terms of mass vaccination clinics, clinics that local health care practitioners can have in their offices, in pharmacies and every possible way forward. But we need that supply of vaccines.

We expect that supplies are going to increase significantly within the next few weeks and we will then be able to proceed, but we are allocating vaccines according to populations across the province. Each area is receiving their equitable volume of supply, but we are putting extra resources into some communities to allow for greater testing and to allow for greater response. We hope that within the next few weeks we will be able to ramp up quite rapidly our vaccination efforts to do—

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

Ms. Doly Begum: With all due respect, a number of our vaccines were stuck in the freezer for weeks and weeks, and a number of the allocated ones that were to be given to Scarborough were actually sent away from Scarborough to other regions that were not hit the same way Scarborough was.

Scarborough has experienced record high positivity rates throughout this crisis. Recently, almost half of the province's ICU cases were in our community. But despite the fact that Scarborough is still a COVID hot spot, and despite the fact that families and workers in our region continue to be at bigger risk of the third wave, yesterday's announcement about the vaccine rollout was a confirmation of our worst fears. The province still doesn't have a plan to keep our communities and our families safe.

My question to the Premier is, will the Premier commit to an equitable vaccination strategy that takes into account hard-hit communities and regions like ours in Scarborough?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I think it is important to stick to the facts, and the facts are that no vaccines are sitting in freezers anywhere. They are being put into people's arms as quickly as possible. In fact, we have had over 620,000 vaccines administered to date, notwithstanding the supply issues that we're having.

We have made sure that every part of the province is receiving an equitable amount based upon their populations. As part of the vaccine task force, I can assure the member opposite that there is a bioethics table that has been reviewed, that has gone through the framework and that is making sure that it is fair and equitable to every community within Ontario.

I can also indicate that we have already set up, launched and implemented our High Priority Communities Strategy, which is providing \$12.5 million to lead local agencies to work in partnership with Ontario public health units and all of the other supply providers—

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

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Michael Coteau: My question is to the minister responsible for children. Ontarians are so disappointed in this government's handling of autism services for children. But this disappointment was brought to an all-time low a few weeks ago when the minister announced a new plan. Families were completely shocked to find out that under the minister's new plan, the people assessing the needs and services of children with autism would be people with literally one day of training. Previously, this was completed by a psychologist or a behavioural analyst with years of training and education.

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Speaker, through you to the minister: How does the minister believe that someone with one day of training is qualified to assess the complex needs and services of children with autism?

Hon. Todd Smith: It's great to get a question on the autism program, and I'm really, really pleased to stand here today and talk about the progress that we're making on the new needs-based program here in Ontario.

In just a week or so, we'll be bringing 600 children into the new needs-based program, and we'll be using all of the tools that have been designed by our expert panel. We had

folks who worked over the summer of 2019 on the autism advisory panel, bringing forward over 100 recommendations in that very substantial document. One of the recommendations was that we have an implementation working group, which is made up of clinical experts and those who are research experts, as well as those with lived experience. So for the first time in the province's history, we've actually gone to the community to design a program for the autism community.

I'm really proud of the recommendations that have been brought forward. We're following all of those recommendations—including the care coordinator that the member opposite is speaking about. I look forward to answering more in the supplementary.

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

Mr. Michael Coteau: I don't know if you noticed, Mr. Speaker, but the member didn't answer the question. It was a very simple question.

This minister, like his predecessor, continues to make promises, and these promises are not kept. Perhaps the minister is too distracted by looking for ways to make cuts to social services during a pandemic; I'm not sure.

Speaker, when it comes to autism services, this government has let families down every step of the way. They promised to eliminate the wait-list; they doubled it. They promised to fund the program to \$660 million; they didn't reach that target. And the minister said that by April of last year—not this year; last year—he would actually have a needs-based program.

He made reference to 600 kids getting services, but literally 1% of the kids on the wait-list are actually going to get service through his new plan.

Can the minister please tell me, why can't he take this file seriously and put in place a program to help children in this province? We're missing an entire generation because of his lack of effort.

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, when this member was the minister on this file, less than a third of the children in the province of Ontario were receiving any support from the province of Ontario.

We have doubled the amount of funding in the Ontario Autism Program, from \$300 million to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The member for Don Valley East, come to order. The member for Northumberland–Peterborough South, come to order.

The Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, respond.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the first time in the province's history, every child who is registered with the Ontario Autism Program is receiving funding from that program. That's something to be celebrated.

When this member was the minister on this file, less than a third of the children were receiving support.

We brought in all kinds of different programs. Foundational family services are now available to every family in the province as soon as they get their diagnosis.

We're creating an urgent response crisis program that will be there for families when they find themselves in crisis. This is going to be the gold standard—

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

LAND USE PLANNING

Mr. Faisal Hassan: My question is to the Premier.

My community of York South–Weston is very disturbed by the news that a new slaughterhouse is opening up in the Stockyards District. Our office has been inundated with emails and calls objecting to this facility.

The previous slaughterhouse was closed and had its licence revoked due to many health and environmental violations.

An environmental compliance approval was granted to the former owners, despite nearly 100 complaints in public consultations in 2018.

How did this new facility get approved, and why was the community not consulted?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: While I'm not specifically aware of the file the member is talking about, I can say that, obviously, agriculture is an incredibly important part of the economy in the province of Ontario. There is a tremendous amount of farmers—including those in my riding, quite frankly—who are responsible for hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars' worth of economic activity. We will continue to support them.

Obviously, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has a big role to play when it comes to slaughterhouses and the regulations of those and the inspections of those, Mr. Speaker. But look, this is a very important industry that is important to the economy and obviously important to all Ontarians. I would hope the member would welcome the jobs in his community. We will make sure, of course, working with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, that it remains a safe place to do business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for York South–Weston, supplementary.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: The community is not against jobs; they want to be consulted and the rules followed.

In 2019, this government announced it would no longer be enforcing environmental standards related to noise and odour from facilities like this new slaughterhouse, and downloaded those responsibilities to municipalities. When is this government going to lead by taking action to ensure a new environmental compliance approval takes place before the new facility opens in March? Why are they downloading noise and environmental odour complaints to municipalities?

Interjection.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, Mr. Speaker, food processing is an extraordinarily important activity. Our farmers do a tremendous job in helping to ensure that we

all have food on our table. We work very closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to make sure that these types of facilities are monitored and work in a safe, humane way.

This is an opportunity to bring hundreds of jobs to a community that I know this member works very hard for and advocates for. He has brought a number of bills before this House to advocate for his community. Here is an opportunity to bring more jobs into this community, to expose the community to the good work of our hard-working farmers. I hope he would encourage this type of job creation in his riding.

I'm always excited when we hear of new opportunities in communities and I like to celebrate the hard work of our farmers. I hope he would do the same thing.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: This question is for the Premier. Last week, the FAO released its latest report on Ontario's labour market. Ontario lost 355,300 jobs in 2020, the largest decline on record. Youth employment dropped to its lowest level in 20 years, while their unemployment rate skyrocketed to 22%, the highest on record. Statistics Canada's labour force survey, to no surprise, shows that the most impacted groups are Black, Indigenous, people of colour, women and youth.

The K recovery in Ontario is a direct result of this government's inaction. As each month goes by in this pandemic, all of Ontario's youth can expect that they are further and further behind in this economic recession, with no relief in sight.

A core economic strength is our people, Speaker. My question is, in the budget coming up, will this government reverse its cuts to OSAP for post-secondary education and free tuition?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond? The Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much. I know the parliamentary assistant to colleges and universities will want to speak to this as well.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we can all be proud of in Ontario is the government's commitment to getting young people into the skilled trades. There are literally hundreds of thousands of opportunities over the next 10 years for people in the skilled trades. I'm really proud of our government's historic investments into pre-apprenticeship programs. To the member who asked this question, a pre-apprenticeship program gives an opportunity to young people to try the trades for a period of 12 weeks, to get a work placement.

I'm really excited to share with this House that on Sunday night, I had a great call from a young lady in Toronto, Nattisha. In her words, she was on welfare. She was a single mom. She got an opportunity to join the trades. She is now an ironworker and, Mr. Speaker, she is earning \$44.08 an hour and she has a pension and benefits.

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, we didn't hear an answer because this government is not prioritizing the needs of youth.

1130

Last week's FAO report highlighted another troubling trend when it comes to women in this province. Women experienced a 5.8% job loss compared to men at 3.9%. The she-cession continues to deepen, with a large amount of job losses for women happening in the cultural and recreational sectors. All the services sectors, Speaker, are hardest hit by this pandemic, and these jobs are not coming back soon.

If this government does not start to value the work women are doing in the workforce in Ontario, we will see more women drop out of the job market altogether. We need to start to value women and the contribution that they make. The care economy, which includes health care and elder care, are importantly staffed by women and require more supports, like early learning and child care.

Speaker, will this government tell us where on the list of priorities is the investment going to be made in this budget into the care economy, so that women can have equal economic opportunity and can recover fully from—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The Minister of Labour will reply.

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Thank you to the member opposite for this very important question. Mr. Speaker, our government every day is working to spread hope and opportunity across the province more widely and fairly. We know that good, meaningful jobs change lives. They strengthen families and all of our communities. I am proud of our redesigned Second Career program that we launched back late last year, a \$77-million investment to really focus on those who have been impacted by the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, I have many young people and many women come up to me, and they say that in Ontario, because of previous governments neglecting the apprenticeship system—they'll say to me, "Monte, I know how to become a teacher, I know how to become a lawyer, but I have no idea how to get into the trades."

Mr. Speaker, it's up to all of us to tell the young people the opportunities available in the skilled trades. There are 144 to choose from and our government is investing a record amount of money to get people—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. There's quite a conversation going on in the chamber and I would ask you to wait a few minutes and maybe take it outside.

The next question. Start the clock.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Premier. Niagara has the third-oldest population by average in the entire country and our seniors are at a greater risk of getting COVID-19. Given the over 200 outbreaks and more than 360 deaths we've had across the region, Niagara

is a high-risk zone. It makes sense that we be given our fair share of all available COVID vaccines, yet in early January, we found out that 5,500 doses of life-saving Moderna vaccine promised to public health was sent elsewhere at the expense of health care workers and seniors.

Mr. Speaker, my question is the same question that our doctors, public health, Niagara Health, health care workers and the residents are asking this Premier: Where were our vaccines sent, why were they diverted, and will he immediately send Niagara its fair share of both vaccines?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, the member will know that that is actually not the case. As the Minister of Health highlighted the other day, all regions are getting their fair share of vaccines.

Obviously, in our vaccination plan, we focused on congregate care settings, long-term-care homes, retirement homes. We were making sure that the vaccines were in place to cover all of those people in those settings, including health care workers, Mr. Speaker.

There was a switch between the Moderna vaccine and Pfizer vaccines, but at no time was Niagara shortchanged of any vaccines, Mr. Speaker. I completely reject what the member is saying. It is a dangerous thing for the member to be saying. We should be all working together to make sure that we all get vaccines and help to defeat COVID-19, not spreading false allegations, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member to withdraw.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Withdraw.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: It is absolutely accurate. Yesterday in this House, the Minister of Health said, when referring to COVID-19 vaccines, "I can assure the member opposite that Niagara did receive its fair share." Niagara doctors disagree. In a letter to the Premier, they ask for a "fair share of vaccines."

Is the minister saying that our health care workers aren't being honest? The doctors also said, "Our teams are burnt out. People are worried for their loved ones." They need hope, and hope was what the vaccine offered. It doesn't make sense that life-saving doses of vaccines were diverted from the Niagara region. In one month, hundreds of seniors died in Niagara, and there was a death every 3.5 hours over a seven-day period, because we didn't get our vaccines.

When will this government be open and transparent with the people of Niagara and let them know where the much-needed vaccines were diverted to? And it is accurate.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think today we've seen the opposition reach, really, a new low. What we're seeing is opposition members pitting region against region when it comes to the fight against COVID-19. We've heard it from the Liberal members earlier, and now we're hearing it from this member.

No region was shortchanged the vaccines that they were due. You've heard the Minister of Health say that it was based on population, but it was also based on what we were doing with respect to initial vaccinations in congregate care settings. Long-term-care homes are what we were focusing on. Retirement homes are what we were focusing on. Health care workers are what we were focusing on. The very same people he references in his question are the very first people that we were focusing on with respect to the vaccinations.

We will continue to work on behalf of all of the people of the province of Ontario. We will take the politics out of it, Mr. Speaker, and we certainly won't do what the opposition are doing, pitting region against region.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our question period.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The government House leader will come to order. The member for Windsor West will come to order. The member for Niagara Falls will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Niagara Falls is warned. The government House leader is warned.

DEFERRED VOTES

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SÉCURITÉ PROFESSIONNELLE ET L'ASSURANCE CONTRE LES ACCIDENTS DU TRAVAIL

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

Bill 238, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 238, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 238, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997. The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1138 to 1208.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 238, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, has been held.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 39; the nays are 14.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, I'll refer it to the Standing Committee on General Government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill will be referred to the Standing Committee on General Government.

HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LE LOGEMENT EN TANT QUE DROIT DE LA PERSONNE

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

Bill 252, An Act to recognize housing as a human right / *Projet de loi 252, Loi visant à reconnaître le logement en tant que droit de la personne.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we have a deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 252, An Act to recognize housing as a human right. The bells will now ring for 15 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1211 to 1226.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 252, An Act to recognize housing as a human right, has been held.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 18; the nays are 34.

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

Second reading negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, the House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1227 to 1300.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader has a point of order that he wishes to present.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I rise in accordance with standing order 59, to outlay the order of business for next week.

Next week, we will be dealing with Bill 245, the Accelerating Access to Justice Act; Bill 251, the Combating Human Trafficking Act; and a bill that will be introduced shortly. To the opposition House leader: I will be informing her tomorrow of what days these bills will be debated on; I just haven't finalized that yet. But we'll make sure that she has advance notice of that.

The private member's bill on Monday, March 1, will be ballot item number 53, standing in the name of the member for Markham-Thornhill, a motion about students being good environmental stewards.

On Tuesday, March 2, ballot item number 54, member for Barrie-Innisfil.

On Wednesday, ballot item number 55, member from Kitchener-Conestoga, Bill 226, the Safer School Buses Act.

On Thursday, ballot item number 56, standing in the name of the member for Ottawa Centre, a motion about the use of the Trespass to Property Act at congregate care accommodations.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROTECTING ONTARIO ELECTIONS ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA PROTECTION DES ÉLECTIONS EN ONTARIO

Mr. Downey moved first reading of the following bill:

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

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the Attorney General to explain his bill.

Hon. Doug Downey: It's my pleasure to introduce the Protecting Ontario Elections Act. It's a bill that, if passed, would take steps to make it easier to cast a vote safely in an advance poll or on election day. It includes responsible changes that would protect Ontarians' essential voice in elections and ensure the province's electoral process is equipped for urgent and evolving challenges, including COVID-19.

Each and every Ontarian is a driving force in our democracy, from casting their votes to volunteering to putting their name on a ballot. We want to make sure that the electoral system continues to evolve to protect Ontarians' central role in elections and promote fairness in the electoral process for everyone.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Todd Smith: I'm pleased to rise in the House today and formally recognize February as Black History Month. It really has been a great month to recognize, honour and celebrate the important contributions of Black individuals across Ontario, Canada and around the world.

In 1995, the government of Canada officially named February Black History Month, and this is all thanks to the efforts of the Honourable Jean Augustine, the first Black woman to be elected to the House of Commons and appointed to the federal cabinet, and the first Fairness Commissioner of the government of Ontario.

For over 25 years, Black History Month has given us the opportunity to appreciate and learn from the successes, stories and rich heritage of the Black community. Black History Month is about honouring the great contributions that Black people have made and continue to make in all sectors of society.

This year's theme for Black History Month is "The Future Is Now." This theme allows us to acknowledge the transformative work that Black Canadians and their communities are doing right now to make Ontario a place of inclusivity and diversity.

There's a long list of Canadian Black heroes, too long to mention in one ministerial statement, Mr. Speaker:

—the Honourable Lincoln Alexander, a Toronto native, who as a Progressive Conservative became the first Black member of Parliament in Canadian history and Lieutenant Governor of Ontario;

—Willie O'Ree, born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, became the first Black hockey player to play in the National Hockey League. There have been a lot of features on him in the NHL broadcasts over the last month;

—Lori Seale-Irving, born in Ottawa, became the first Black female commissioned officer in the RCMP; and

—Jully Black of Toronto, Canada's queen of R&B and a vocal advocate for LGBTQ communities.

These are just a few of the countless Black Canadians who have paved the way for generations to come.

It's important that we not only honour these achievements for what they are but also for how they were achieved. While this is a month of celebration, we must remember that these great accomplishments did not come without great struggle. Black History Month reminds us that we stand on the shoulders of giants and that we owe it to them to continue to fight their battle against discrimination. We must also acknowledge the painful memories associated with the transatlantic slave trade, racism, segregation and the history of anti-Black legislation and policies.

The strength and resilience of our Black communities has helped shape the culture that we live in today. Over the years, many Black Ontarians—those born here and those who have immigrated here—have made and continue to make important contributions to our province's social, cultural, economic and political landscape. Today, Black people are building a better future for everyone as they are making a difference in all areas, including academia, the arts, health, sciences, sports, business and on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With that said, I'd like to take a moment to recognize and celebrate the amazing Black men and women who are part of this very Legislature—phenomenal leaders who are an inspiration to young children across the province. Although we may not always see eye to eye, depending on which side of the aisle you're on, I truly do value your different perspectives and I thank you for challenging my own, as we share the same goal of building a just and inclusive province.

While it is evident that we have come a long way, we still have much farther to go. Racism still exists. That's

why we must not only use Black History Month to celebrate the past but also view it as a beacon of hope for the future. We've made tremendous strides towards diversity and inclusion. However, considering the events of the past year, it has been made clear that there's still work to be done in our battle against racial discrimination and intolerance in all its forms. We must acknowledge our past, and by shining a light on the injustices committed against the Black community, both past and present, we can begin to heal wounds. We can promote intercultural understanding and, ultimately, build bridges between communities.

We believe that building a fair and inclusive province starts with investing in the next generation of Black leaders and professionals. Our government is actively working to support the needs of our young Black youth so that they, too, can make a difference.

Last year, our government established the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity. This council gives a voice to young leaders in struggling communities so that we can better our understanding of how we can effectively remove social and economic barriers to success for Black youth.

We've doubled our investment in the Black youth action plan, allowing participating agencies to continue delivering important programs designed to improve outcomes for Black children, youth and families in Ontario, even in the middle of this pandemic. While many programs and services made possible through the Black youth action plan are centred in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area, or Ottawa and Windsor, there are other investments, such as the Youth Opportunities Fund, that are available in communities province-wide.

This year alone, our government is investing over \$13 million to support 43 community projects through the Youth Opportunities Fund. This funding supports a variety of programs, like the Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham's Together WE Can Mentorship Program, which addresses the need for increased access to mentorship opportunities for Black youth—male and female, ages 12 to 25—experiencing life challenges and looking to establish a support system.

Additionally, the Markham African Caribbean Canadian Association's KinnectYouth Mentoring Program, which is funded by my ministry, is specifically aimed at providing mentors and critical life skills development for young Black teenagers, aged 13 to 19, who are in contact with child welfare or our newcomers to Canada.

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We remain committed to putting an end to racism and discrimination of all forms, and taking action by investing \$1.6 million over two years to create a new anti-racism and anti-hate grant program. This funding will support community-based anti-racism initiatives, focusing on combatting anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Acting to strategically strengthen Black communities and businesses and creating new opportunities for aspiring Black entrepreneurs are part of Ontario's plan to build a fairer and more inclusive economy.

As our government recently announced, just this week as a matter of fact, Ontario is helping Black entrepreneurs and Black-owned tech start-ups access the resources and the tools that they need to succeed in Ontario's changing economy by supporting Ryerson University's DMZ Black Innovation Programs with a \$1.2-million investment over the next three years. This is funding that will support, mentor and connect Black youth entrepreneurs with the resources and tools that they need to grow their business ideas and succeed in Ontario's changing economy.

We had a great day at the DMZ earlier this week with my colleague Minister Prab Sarkaria and the president of Ryerson, Dr. Mohamed Lachemi.

By empowering Black youth and communities, we can ensure that they play a prominent role in shaping a better future for our province. Anti-Black racism and racism in general have absolutely no place in our province.

As Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, I remain firm on my commitment to tackling anti-Black racism and discrimination within our institutions and society. By working together, we've made progress with our efforts to remove social and economic barriers in Ontario, but we know that our work is far from over.

So, as we all celebrate Black History Month, I encourage all Ontarians to join the members of this House in recognizing and paying tribute to our province's rich Black history. Doing so will help us to continue to build an Ontario that is inclusive and that is strong.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Responses? The member for Brampton North.

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for his speech as well.

Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to rise on behalf of the residents of Brampton North as the first Black member of provincial Parliament for the region of Peel. I'm happy to respond to the statements on Black History Month on behalf of the official opposition.

Black History Month this year has been unlike any before. While we have missed the opportunity to gather together, face to face, it has still been a privilege to join so many community organizations and groups across the province in virtual events that celebrate Black excellence and Black leadership in Ontario.

The city of Brampton is home to a vibrant and active Black community. Brampton could not be the city it is today without strong, dynamic Black leadership at the municipal level, in education, in business, in the arts. Today, Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight one Black-led organization that does tremendous work in our community. Legacy United has been supporting minority groups and vulnerable communities in the GTA through programs like career mentorship and the Black Girls' Club.

The board of Legacy United is made up of three passionate young Black activists, and I would like to acknowledge them and their tremendous passion to serve their community. Courtney Fraser is a licensed paralegal and current lawyer licensed in Canada by the Law Society of Ontario and serves as the legal consultant for Legacy

United. Tamique Gordon has contributed numerous years to social activism within her community and has a strong dedication to social change and serves as Legacy United's community affairs officer. Oswald Poyser has extensive experience in business and networking and serves as Legacy United's marketing officer. These are just some of the young Black leaders working in Brampton to support our community.

As the member for provincial Parliament for Brampton North, a member of the official opposition's Black caucus, I would like to extend our heartfelt thank you for the work that they do.

Mr. Speaker, while Black History Month will always be a time to celebrate the achievements of Black Ontarians, we cannot deny that this year has been a difficult one for everyone. People in communities across this province have been struggling, and Black communities—along with Indigenous and racialized communities—have been disproportionately on the front lines, feeling the impact most deeply and paying the steepest price.

So while it is a privilege to stand in the House today, I must also call on this government to step up to the plate to address the structural anti-Black racism that also exists in Ontario. Black Ontarians across different sectors are feeling the effects of this inequity. Thankfully, we know what steps need to be taken to help Black communities weather the COVID-19 storm and look ahead to a strong recovery. We know because Black community members, Black leaders, Black health experts and Black business leaders have been telling us.

Mr. Speaker, public health interventions to crush COVID-19 will go a long way to help Black communities that are being disproportionately infected and impacted by the virus. That means supporting my colleague the member from London West's bill and finally legislating paid sick days. It means banning pandemic evictions, as my colleague from Toronto Centre's bill would do. It means training and hiring thousands more PSWs to address the crisis in long-term care. It also means giving those PSWs—so many of them who are Black and racialized women—a \$4-an-hour raise to recognize the value of their work. It means giving the small businesses that are the lifeblood of Black communities help and hope by implementing our Save Main Street plan and providing them with direct financial support to make it through the pandemic intact.

Doing right by Black Ontarians during the pandemic and afterwards also requires a commitment to stop the decades of underinvestment in Black communities. This can begin by listening to Black health leaders, including the AllianceON Black Health Committee, Black Health Alliance and the Network for the Advancement of Black Communities, and taking swift action to address anti-Black racism through the government's work.

That starts with reversing short-sighted cuts to the Anti-Racism Directorate, properly funding it and empowering it with a clear, targeted, multi-faceted strategy to address anti-Black racism in all sectors.

It means overhauling our justice system that continues to fail Black Ontarians and overhauling broken accountability infrastructures to finally start addressing systemic bias and harm to Black communities.

It means taking real action to address anti-Black racism in education by developing and implementing racial equity strategies that address the problems we have seen in schools in my home community of Peel and many others across the province.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker—

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

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: It is an honour for me to rise in the House today to speak about Black History Month.

Every time I enter this Legislature, I think of my grandmother Eva Hunter. When I speak, I remember her, and I speak in a strong voice because of her. My grandmother Eva immigrated to this country on a domestic visa, and in just a few short generations, her granddaughter can stand here and represent the people of her community. It's because of her journey that I'm here.

This week, as we mark the final days of Black History Month 2021, we are once again reminded of the pioneering spirit of people like my grandmother and Dr. Jean Augustine.

In 1993, Dr. Augustine made history when she became the first African Canadian woman elected to the House of Commons as the member of Parliament for Etobicoke–Lakeshore. Two years later, Dr. Augustine made history again when her motion to designate February as Black History Month in Canada received unanimous consent.

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The legacy of this achievement is clear: Over the course of the past 25 years, the month of February has taken on an important meaning throughout Canada as a time to reflect on how Black history is integral to everyone's history. Black history is Canada's history. Black history has been made, is being made and will continue to be made going forward. Black history happens 365 days of the year.

This year, as we persevere against a pandemic that has fully exposed Canada's long-standing socio-economic disparity, the virus has had a disproportionate impact on Black lives. It is also clear that the important work of creating space for a true appreciation of Black history must continue to go beyond the month. While we have been having conversations about anti-Black racism and systemic racism, it is evident that we need to dig deeper into Black history. This has to be done both from a critical and a Canadian perspective. If we do this effectively, we can find ways to leverage Black History Month to facilitate a collective understanding of the deep-rooted and systemic causes of existing inequalities and work to address them.

Just yesterday, a report from the Prosperity Project highlighted that Black women and Indigenous women are critically absent from middle-level positions in 48 of Canada's largest corporations. It is impossible to advance to more senior ranks if you are not there to begin with. Governments must examine the role that they can play to

correct this, especially in the broader public sector and in the public service.

Speaker, today, as we reflect on the past 12 months, we are at a juncture that requires the next step to go beyond just learning about Black history. We need to become involved. We need to demand swift, substantive action and we need to play a part in bringing about lasting change. Most critically, we need to do it together. “Ubuntu” is an African phrase that means “togetherness.”

To that end, as this Black History Month draws to a close, it is more important than ever to remember and to celebrate figures like Dr. Jean Augustine, who inspire us all as Canadians, or my grandmother, Eva Hunter, who inspires me every day.

The work of the Ontario Black History Society and all that they do remind us that Ontario's legacy is indeed built on the rich history of Black people. In this diverse nation that is Canada, Black History Month will always be part of our core and collective value.

PETITIONS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: This petition is entitled “Support Ontario Families with Autism.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

“Whereas the new funding caps are based on age and income, and not the clinical needs of the child;

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

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

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Donna Skelly: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas though most consumers are unaware of the high environmental cost of fast fashion, fully 85% of unwanted clothing and textiles in North America end up in landfills;

“Whereas companies who engage in fast fashion practices capitalize on low operational costs, creating dangerous working conditions with minimum pay to employees;

“Whereas fast fashion textile dyeing is the second-largest polluter of clean water globally;

“Whereas these unethical garment production practices constitute more than 24 billion pounds of waste clothing every year, rendering fashion one of the world’s worst polluters;

“We, the undersigned, support” MPP Skelly’s “don’t dump, donate initiative, to encourage retailers and consumers to support ethically, and to donate old textiles to charity, diverting more clothing from landfills into donation bins.

“The initiative also encourages manufacturers to have additional donate tags or stamps on clothing items and encourages retailers to set up donation bins in their stores. These efforts along with those outlined in Ontario’s comprehensive Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan will help reduce waste and pollution, preserving the province’s beautiful and ecologically important natural environment.”

I, of course, support this petition, will affix my signature and give it to the appropriate page.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: This petition is titled, “Affordable Housing.” It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas for families throughout much of Ontario, owning a home they can afford remains a dream, while renting is painfully expensive;

“Whereas consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have sat idle, while housing costs spiralled out of control, speculators made fortunes, and too many families had to put their hopes on hold;

“Whereas every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable housing. Whether a family wants to rent or own, live in a house, an apartment, a condominium or a co-op, they should have affordable options;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately prioritize the repair of Ontario’s social housing stock, commit to building new affordable homes, crack down on housing speculators, and make rentals more affordable through rent controls and updated legislation.”

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

LIFE INSURANCE

Ms. Donna Skelly: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas at a time when many people, especially seniors, are struggling due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, more needs to be done to meet the needs of vulnerable people;

“Whereas important updates in order to modernize the Insurance Act are required;

“Whereas changes are needed to allow Ontario seniors to access the fair market value of their life insurance policies which could potentially give seniors tens of millions of dollars more than they now receive, each year;

“Whereas, if passed, Bill 219 would:

“—modernize the Insurance Act to create a well-regulated secondary market in life insurance;

“—provide access to an alternative financial resource and allow Ontario seniors to access the fair market value of their life insurance policies;

“—ensure consumers are protected by requiring full, true and plain disclosure;

“—require a 10-day cooling-off period;

“—ensure the right to consult a financial or legal advisor;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario vote on and pass the Life Settlements and Loans Act.”

I support this petition, will affix my signature and hand it to the page.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Doly Begum: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas cuts to provincial child care funding will raise child care fees and freeze child care subsidies for low-income parents;

“Whereas over 400,000 Ontario families rely on licensed child care every day to work and study;

“Whereas over 100,000 families use child care fee subsidy;

“Whereas licensed child care supports Ontario’s families, communities and economy;

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

“Stop the provincial child care cuts and restore child care funding.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to the usher to give to the Clerks.

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

NATURAL GAS PIPELINE

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I move that the House take note of the economic and employment impacts of the potential closure of the line 5 energy corridor.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I’ll look to the member for Barrie–Innisfil to lead off the debate.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: We’re at an interesting point in history right now, and I think it’s important that our Ontario Legislature take note of this debate, because it’s not just team Ontario that’s affected; it’s team Canada, it’s team North America.

And this wouldn’t be possible without the advocacy and the big support of the member from Sarnia–Lambton, who has been working day in and day out to put this issue on everyone’s agenda. I’ll tell you, Speaker, he has been relentless, sending letters to Governor Whitmer and her

counterparts in the United States, and working with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Just yesterday, he was meeting with the Michigan Chamber of Commerce—and meeting with many union and labour employees in his own constituency and those all across this province, because the member from Sarnia–Lambton knows that this issue is above politics and that it’s about the people. He wants to stand up and speak for the economic impact that this is going to have not only on his riding, but again, on all of Ontario and North America.

In our caucus, of course, many different members are affected by this, whether it’s the member from Flam-borough–Glanbrook—it will affect the airport; whether it’s the member from Chatham–Kent–Leamington, a member who actually used to work for Union Gas. That area will also be impacted by the closure of line 5. Our member from Norfolk would also be impacted by this—and the refinery and the hundreds of jobs that would be impacted.

Line 5 is a critical, essential artery that enables secure and reliable transportation of light crude oil, light synthetic oil and natural gas liquids to three refineries and natural gas practitioners in Sarnia–Lambton. Without line 5, it will impact Ontario, Quebec, Michigan and the entire Great Lakes region, and they would face a 45% reduction in their pipeline supply of petroleum. This is a team North America issue. Line 5 connects Alberta and Saskatchewan, which connects it to markets in central Canada. It’s critical for their jobs, as well. It affects the cost of living, the economy and thousands of products that Canadians rely on every single day.

According to the Michigan Oil and Gas Association, without line 5 there would be over 5,000 more trucking miles just for the delivery between Toledo and Detroit alone, to get the natural resources there.

The closure would threaten thousands of well-paying jobs across Canada and would put a strain on our transportation infrastructure here at home, increasing the safety and environmental risks associated with transporting oil by rail, barge or truck.

Ontario’s petroleum refinery industry is a key resource to our high-skilled, well-paying jobs. Line 5 is essential for our economy. And just jobs that it will impact itself if it were to shut down—it has an impact of over 4,000 direct jobs and 23,000 indirect jobs in Sarnia alone. That is one third of that area’s employment. And that’s just that area; we haven’t even gotten to the fact that it’s going to impact places like Saskatchewan, Alberta, Michigan, Ohio—thousands of well-paying jobs.

Today, of course, in this discussion around line 5, I also want to talk about the how it’s going to impact my constituency. When I spoke to the Simcoe County Federation of Agriculture, Colin Elliot told me that we get our propane from line 5. We would not have enough propane to dry our corn. We had a stoppage last year because the trains stopped. The trains are really all we have. If line 5 is shut down, we’re in deep trouble because that is the way that we get our propane. We get it from line 5. Speaker, that’s not just from the Simcoe federation of agriculture but also our local Barrie chamber.

I know the Ontario chamber has been a huge supporter of not shutting down line 5. The Ontario chamber has said, “Shutting down line 5—even temporarily—would have a major and immediate impact on supply for refineries....”

“The pipeline is also a critical piece of energy infrastructure for Ontario. It enables the domestic production of gasoline, diesel, jet fuel, and other petroleum products, a far more cost-effective solution than relying on imports from refineries in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Line 5 supplies crude oil to the Sarnia petrochemical manufacturing complex, which directly employs over 4,900 people and is responsible for an additional 23,500 jobs”—again, that’s one third of that region’s employment.

“In addition to petroleum products, line 5 is also important for the production of natural gas liquids (NGL) at the Sarnia NGL facility. Sarnia’s NGL output helps maintain storage levels and peak winter deliverability of propane for heating in Michigan and Ontario.” That’s from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The Barrie Chamber of Commerce is also affected by this, and they write, “The Barrie Chamber of Commerce is aligned with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce’s stance of support for the continued operation of Enbridge line 5. The pipeline is a critical part of Ontario’s energy infrastructure and Ontarians cannot afford the significant increase in energy costs and the massive job losses that will follow with the closure of this pipeline.”

That’s not just it, Speaker. Kevin Eisses, the president of Addis Grain Ltd. and the vice-president of Hewitt Creek Farms—he is a constituent of mine in Innisfil and a local Innisfil councillor, and he said this to me when I was talking to him about this line 5 debate: “Thank you for working on this important issue on our behalf. I have been aware of the issue from the Grain Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. It is a critical one for many parts of our farm economy and beyond.

“The CN rail strike of 2019 stopped a portion of propane coming into Ontario at a crucial time for grain farmers in all Ontario. Our energy supplier was forced to choose customers who needed propane for home heat and farmers who needed the fuel to dry their crops during the harvest period.” Speaker, this is not a decision that we want to put upon more Ontarians, that they have to choose between heating their homes or drying their food supply.

He goes on to say that this will affect not only just him but the entire supply. He says, “There are no energy alternatives available to bring Ontario-grown grain into a stable state that can be marketed and stored properly. There are no alternatives on the horizon”—from, again, local constituent Kevin Eisses.

You might wonder what else he does. He goes above and beyond as a local constituent. His family has been in the business for about 60 years, and they’ve been giving back to things like the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, which helps fight world hunger. So these are the types of individuals that would be affected by the shutdown.

Not just him: Local farmer Anne Kell, also a family of farmers who have been in the area for generations, said that they cannot cope with this disruption. She says,

“Prices are up now because of the carbon tax as well as already existing supply issues. If propane and fuel supplies are disrupted, especially in the springtime when farmers are busy preparing and planting fields, this will simply compound emotional and financial stress in an industry already dealing with supply chain issues due to COVID.”

The Kell family has done so much for our community. Not only in Innisfil do they give back to the food bank and local charitable donations like Christmas for Kids, but every year they go and distribute—through the organization Sleeping Children Around the World, they of course distribute bed kits for those individuals. Again, if they’re affected by this, this is less that they can give back, again bringing it down to, this is a people issue.

Boris Horodynsky, as well, a very well-renowned onion farmer who comes from humble beginnings—his family emigrated from the Ukraine. He would also be affected by line 5. He supplies the best yellow and red onions across Ontario and ships internationally, and he is one of the individuals who has donated about \$1 million to our new Rizzardo health centre in Innisfil—again, someone who will be affected by line 5, and he gives so much to this community. It’s up to us to stand up and help support these individuals in how this line will affect them.

My riding, of course, Barrie–Innisfil, also has a nickname: It’s called “Terminal 4.” The reason it’s called Terminal 4 is because we have so many Air Canada workers who live in the area. They too will be impacted by line 5, as line 5 provides the fuel to Pearson airport.

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The airline industry has already been impacted so, so hard, and this is not yet another blow they can afford—which is why my local counterpart, MP John Brassard, also wrote Governor Whitmer. In his letter, he reinforces the statement by the MPP for Sarnia–Lambton that 50,000 jobs are on the line. These are well-paying, skilled jobs. This is going to affect the next generation of people who want to go into STEM skills. It’s going to affect many well-paying jobs.

It’s easy to see, Speaker, because we have support. The people who support line 5, because their livelihood depends on it, are the Sarnia union, the UA Local 140 Plumbers and Pipefitters union. It is also supported by the Michigan Laborers’ District Council and the labour union Laborers’ Local 1191, where they’re going to have 13,000 members affected. I think it’s clear this will affect jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I’m pleased to join today’s take-note debate. Take-note debates are a relatively new format for us in this House. They allow members of the House to discuss issues that are novel, that sort of come out of nowhere, and to take immediate action to make sure that we are all aware of the concerns each of us have regarding them. So I believe that this debate today is poignant. It’s relative and relevant, and I’m happy to take part in it.

Speaker, the issue around the line 5 pipeline that runs almost 1,000 kilometres from Superior, Wisconsin, through the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and through the

Straits of Mackinac is one that isn’t new. There have been issues throughout its 67-year history in that—discussions with communities that are affected with a pipeline running through them, discussions and debates around Indigenous and First Nation rights along the corridor of the pipeline: These are debates that have happened since the pipeline was first constructed.

But one of the issues that is well known is the pipeline’s integrity under the Straits of Mackinac. It’s the fact that an aging pipeline potentially poses a risk to 40 million Canadians and Americans who live within the water basin throughout the Great Lakes and who rely on that fresh water for drinking water.

So, the concerns that have been raised through the Michigan Legislature and the governor of Michigan, Governor Whitmer, are legitimate concerns. There is no question about it: We have to have these discussions about our energy future, our energy dependence, on fossil fuels and our transition away from fossil fuels. But at a point in time, in the middle of a pandemic, when jobs are perilous, when we have not diversified as a nation or an economy enough to be able to have various types of energy supply our industries, we have to recognize that the dependence on line 5 and its interconnection to so many industries within that corridor is something that we can’t act unilaterally on.

This is an issue that requires this House at the provincial level and most certainly our federal counterparts to enact and deploy diplomacy, to discuss this issue with our partners in the United States at the state level and at the national level. That’s why, last week, our leader, Andrea Horwath, wrote to the federal Minister of Natural Resources, Seamus O’Regan, outlining our concerns about the potential immediate shutdown of line 5, the effects that it would have on our economy and all the facets that have already been raised.

We highlight in the letter, which I will read, “the line 5 pipeline and the urgent need for the Canadian government to do all it can to protect an estimated 3,000 jobs in Sarnia ... and the environmental safety and integrity of the Great Lakes. These important jobs are under threat as a result of the unilateral actions by the state of Michigan ordering the May 2021 shutdown of the line 5 pipeline.”

Our leader goes on to ask for an account of any and all actions that the federal government has taken to date with the United States government and the government of Michigan, and what further actions are contemplated, particularly as it affects jobs in the Sarnia area: “I am also asking for an account of what action you have taken with Enbridge regarding their responsibilities to ensure the future safety of the pipeline and to address any concerns raised by affected Indigenous communities.”

We are definitely on the record as understanding the economic impacts that a shutdown in May would hold for our economies, juxtaposed and balanced with the need to ensure environmental protection for those that rely on the safe drinking water that our Great Lakes provide. This is the concern that we have with governments that have abandoned regulatory regimes that provide oversight for

pipelines. We only have to look at this government and the attacks on our conservation authorities and source water protections that we already have seen.

We haven't heard—I hope to hear throughout the debate—concerns about the potential environmental calamity that would happen should a pipeline that runs through the Straits of Mackinac produce if there were, unfortunately, a leak in that line. We understand that Enbridge recognizes that there need to be upgrades, and they have proposed and applied for permits to tunnel under the Great Lakes, under the Straits of Mackinac, to create a new line, to ensure that if there were an accident, it would not spill directly into the waterway. We welcome that type of engineering and ingenuity, but it doesn't get us out of the problem that we have going forward into the future.

We're dealing with a carbon-based economy that is finite. At some point, there will be a reckoning that every Legislature, both in the United States and around the world will have to deal with that we can no longer bear the brunt and the costs of climate change. This province alone spends roughly \$5 billion a year dealing with climate change. We also know that those costs are going to rise upwards of \$30 billion a year going forward into the future for our communities to deal with rising levels of water and the impacts of climate change in our communities. So we have to propose a better solution going forward.

New Democrats have put forward solutions over so many years, but most recently you'll be able to see our plan articulated in the New Democratic green new deal that invests money into new technologies, to new forms of energy conservation and energy production to green our economy like industries all around the world are doing and investing in. In fact, economies are divesting from old models of energy usage and investing in droves. The investment in green energy technologies presents the largest economic boon for regions and countries and investors that we've seen in generations.

We implore this government to look at a way that we can ensure that we have a diverse energy mix so that communities like Sarnia, and those jobs that are so heavily reliant on fossil fuels and carbon-based economies, can have a future for their families.

Speaker, I've travelled. I've spent lots of time with workers in Sarnia. I've spoken to families that have lost loved ones due to the industrial impacts of the industry in Sarnia. They call it Chemical Valley. In the early 1970s and 1980s, there was an epidemic of asbestos-related deaths in Sarnia, asbestosis, where mainly wives lost their husbands who worked in these refineries. There's a legacy of having to deal with the impacts of harsh industrialization and economic activity.

We have a better plan. There can be a better plan going forward, but it requires governments to actually understand and embrace new technologies. Although we understand that the impacts of closing line 5 and shutting it down in May 2021 would be disastrous for the regions that rely so heavily on liquefied natural gas and refined petroleum, we have to have a plan going forward, because this will not be the last take-note debate that we have on

this subject. It will require all of our efforts, and if we are sincere, as the member across the way said, about being not only Team Ontario and Team Canada but Team North America, then we have to come together with a plan that addresses the environmental impacts of carbon-based economies on our climate and protects those jobs. That responsibility specifically in this case lies directly with the federal government. That's why our leader has implored the federal Minister of Natural Resources to do all they can to intervene to protect not only those jobs that may be in jeopardy if this decision goes forward but also the environment that could be jeopardized if the worst-case scenarios play out.

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Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: We also are quite confident that this issue itself is a little bit of a jurisdictional football at this point under the 1977 pipelines treaty. We are quite certain it does not allow the state of Michigan to arbitrarily make this decision, and in discussions with industry representatives, this is something that will be tied up in the courts for quite some time as it plays itself out. But let it be known that New Democrats stand with the workers in Sarnia to ensure those jobs are protected, and as we transition to a new green economy, that it is a just transition, fair to those workers, fair to those communities and protects those families for the jobs not only of today but into the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I would remind all members that the side conversations are quite disruptive, especially when they're across great distances. If you would like to be on the record, you're welcome to join the debate at any time, much like the member from Sarnia-Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to be here today and to speak to this take-note debate. I want to thank the member from Essex for talking about jobs and the economy. I know he knows his way to Sarnia-Lambton, because I've enjoyed many meetings there with the construction industry, where he was there with me about pipelines, actually, at LiUNA's headquarters. That's a while ago now.

But I want to say that, yes, I'm glad he touched on the new technology, because Enbridge intends to spend half a billion dollars to put a new tunnel underneath the Straits of Mackinac, something like nine to 10 kilometres long, over to the other side. It's technology that we're quite used to in Sarnia-Lambton. We have a number of pipelines under the river in the St. Clair, one we just finished about a year and a half ago. So our people on our side are quite used to taking part in that.

The issue of line 5 that we have gathered to discuss today is something we all share a stake in. As my colleague previously mentioned, last November the governor of Michigan took the unprecedented action of revoking the 1953 Easement allowing Enbridge's line 5 pipeline to operate through the Straits of Mackinac, an action taken

after line 5 has been operation for 65 years of safe, reliable service. The governor's order takes effect in May, two months from now. That is why it is so important that we are gathered here today as members of this Legislature to discuss how important line 5 is to our province, our neighbours in Quebec and to our country and province as a whole.

In a meeting yesterday that I attended between the government and business leaders from Ontario and Michigan, sponsored by the Ontario and Michigan chambers of commerce, line 5 and my riding of Sarnia–Lambton was described as ground zero in this debate. That's because my riding of Sarnia–Lambton is home to the largest refining and petrochemical complex in the Great Lakes region. It's where line 5 connects western Canada with eastern Canada. If you've ever filled up with gas, hopped on a flight at Pearson, had something delivered to your home, shopped for local Ontario produce or turned up the temperature on your thermostat, there's a good chance that that energy that made that possible came from Sarnia–Lambton.

The people of Sarnia–Lambton and the workers are very proud of the work that we do there. We are the birthplace of the commercial oil production in North America, dating all the way back to 1858 in Oil Springs, Ontario. We've been producing and refining oil and gas ever since.

It goes without saying that as a community, the impact of shutting off line 5 will be immediate and deep. The Sarnia–Lambton petrochemical manufacturing complex directly employs over 4,900 people. It is a highly integrated, interlinked cluster. A key advantage of this cluster is that a by-product from one manufacturer is not waste, but actually becomes an input for a neighbouring company. There's no other place like it in the province, and it represents one of our most important economic assets, generating more than \$28 billion in annual economic input for the province.

An additional 23,500 indirect jobs, approximately one third of Sarnia–Lambton's total employment, are supported by the Sarnia–Lambton petrochemical complex. This includes approximately 6,000 unionized tradespeople who provide construction services to Sarnia–Lambton's Chemical Valley—highly skilled tradespeople from labour unions like Laborers' International Union of North America, the United Association of Canadian Piping Trades Local 663, the International Union of Operating Engineers 793—the union I was once a part of many years ago—the Ontario International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Millwrights Local 1592, Carpenters' Local 1256, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the Sarnia building trades, and the list goes on.

Without line 5, all the work done by these hard-working men and women would be in jeopardy. The significance of line 5 to the energy security of our province and this country can't be understated. The significance of line 5 to the economic health of our province cannot be understated. That is why it is so important that as members of this Legislature we all stand and take our turn discussing

the critically important task of ensuring line 5 remains operational.

Our government and the government caucus have been actively working this file for months to raise its profile with the federal government and the people Ontario. I, myself, along with the Premier and the energy ministers, have drafted letters both to Governor Whitmer and Prime Minister Trudeau. Of course, all the federal members of Parliament in the Liberal caucus as well as the Conservative caucus have all received letters from provincial members. I've encouraged many in my caucus to write letters as well.

But we need more than just leadership from the local member, the Associate Minister of Energy, the Minister of Energy or the Premier. We've all been doing our part reaching out to our federal colleagues, writing to the Prime Minister and his cabinet ministers asking for advocacy on their part. This is truly a time when we need a Team Canada approach to resolve this issue. Line 5 is an energy lifeline for our province. The products carried by line 5 from western Canada through Wisconsin and Michigan before being delivered to Sarnia–Lambton for refining become the fuel that fuels our modern lives.

The line 5 pipeline supplies about half of the crude oil used by Ontario and Quebec refineries, which make everyday products like gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and home heating fuels such as propane. The various chemical products produced from the by-products of the refining process are used in many industries and sectors across our province and beyond: agriculture, construction, food production, manufacturing, textiles, transportation and more. The list of sectors that have benefited from the safe, reliable movement of products through line 5 for the last 65 years seems almost endless.

Line 5 transports up to 540,000 barrels per day of light crude oil, light synthetic crude and natural gas liquids. If the governor of Michigan were to be successful in shutting down line 5, refineries served by line 5 in Ontario, Quebec, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania would see their supply drop by almost half. There's no easy, safe or realistic way to replace that supply. We'd either be looking at trucking or rail—that's about it. Maybe maritime on the Great Lakes, but that's not easy either.

It's almost a certainty that prices at the pumps would increase and so would prices for home heating fuel. We've worked very hard to try and limit the economic damage of the COVID-19 pandemic for households and small businesses over the last 11 months. To now face the possibility of energy supply issues and rapidly rising costs on essentials like fuel, food and home heating—one has to look no further than the recent events in Texas to understand what kind of impact that can have.

I want to thank all the members of the government caucus and the opposition caucus, as well, as we see how we've engaged on this very important issue on line 5. I was glad to hear the member from Barrie–Innisfil talk about agriculture and the impacts. She has obviously reached out to many people in her riding. That's great.

The Premier, the Minister of Energy and the associate minister have all been working with me non-stop on this

line 5 for the past few months. I want to let them know that it has gotten the attention of the people of Sarnia–Lambton and they appreciate it.

To the people of Sarnia–Lambton who are watching or listening today, I want to let you know that our government, myself, the Premier and all of our caucus members will do everything we can do to make sure that line 5 remains open and your jobs are protected.

Our neighbours in Michigan are our friends; they're our best trading partners. We share the Great Lakes region together and we share an international and regional economy. We're all best served when Ontario and Michigan work together and lead together.

I know there's a broad coalition of support both in my community and on the Michigan and American side—I've dealt with the two chambers of commerce, like I said. We have a Team Ontario approach, a Team Canada approach, and I broached the subject the other day on a call that we should be looking at a Team North America approach to energy, because it's very important.

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We can talk about the future and how we're going to transition from this product to another product. But, ladies and gentlemen watching this today, for the foreseeable future, crude oil and its derivatives are going to be a major part of this economy, whether it's for jet fuel at Pearson or at the Detroit airport. So that's not going to happen overnight. We can do these things at the same time, in parallel.

Thank you again to all of my colleagues for the work you're doing here today by taking part in this debate, especially my caucus colleagues who have supported me in this all along. It's a collective effort that will make a difference. I look forward to the rest of today's important debate.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll yield the floor.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Hon. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate this afternoon; I don't get the opportunity very often anymore. I want to thank the member from Sarnia–Lambton for inviting me to join this event this afternoon—*one that, quite frankly, is very, very easy for me to support.*

Energy can be measured in so many ways—joules, kilowatts, BTUs, calories and horsepower, and those are just a few. We can't function as a society without energy. Our standard of living has been directly related, as it has improved over the centuries and the decades more recently—it has been dependent on a certain supply of energy. What we have here with line 5 is, for us, certainty—a certain supply of energy.

What has happened in Michigan—and I know I'll be reiterating some of the things that others have said—is that the governor of Michigan decided, as she was campaigning last year, before she was governor, that she was going to shut down line 5, which brings so much of this energy here to us in Ontario, but also fuels many of the states, as well as the province of Quebec.

In the political world, people can sometimes become short-sighted, and they can see a goal that is the immediate

political goal and lose sight of the big picture. I really think that's what has happened here.

When you start to examine all of the things that will fall out as a result of this, you really have to ask yourself if this is a prudent decision. The answer for me and, I believe, for this Legislature—I'm not exactly sure where the opposition is going to land on this motion today, in this debate, but I believe they see the reasonable position that my colleague and our party have taken on this issue. We are speaking for the people of Ontario. We are speaking for the people around Sarnia–Lambton, the jobs, the standard of living they rely on, and the industry that has meant so much to that standard of living. There's no point mincing words here: Petroleum and petrochemicals and the petroleum industry are the lifeblood of that community.

Let's put it into perspective, to where we really are today.

I understand the member from Essex when he talks about how there is a focus on alternative forms and how the world is changing with regard to its focus on energy. But a desire to get somewhere doesn't actually get you there; you actually have to go through that process.

As my colleague has said, for the significant foreseeable future, we're going to be dependent on the energy that lines like line 5 bring us.

I know that Enbridge is even involved in a pilot project, if you want to call it that, about hydrogen-powered vehicles, because now we've got to talk about—it's not about cars. We know that Ford and GM and all of the big automakers are saying, "We're going to be electrified by such and such a time"—but that's only a portion of the motorized vehicles on this planet. The big freighters, the trucks, they're not going to be electrified. The ships that travel our oceans and seas that are all powered by diesel—we know that back in the late 1800s, when Rudolf Diesel built and designed the first diesel engines, he revolutionized—revolutionized—the economies of our world with the invention of the diesel engine. Diesel is still what fuels the world because all of the shipping went from sails to steam to diesel, and if you're not powered by diesel today, you're powered by nuclear.

So I'd say to the critic on the other side, which one do you like? Because that's the reality of the world today, and we live in a very small world. Things have to get from one corner to the other, and fuel and energy are what get them from one place to the other.

When we're talking about this line 5, which is older than I am—it can prove that it's a success, because my colleague says that it's been functioning for 65 years. I still can't claim to be a success. I need another, oh, year and a couple of months maybe, and maybe I'll be able to claim to be a success.

But line 5 absolutely is a success. It's been a safely operating vehicle, conduit for energy for that length of time. I hope that not only will the other party on the other side support us in this debate today, but also support the improvements and the changes that Enbridge is talking about, where they're going to make this even more safe by tunnelling. They're going to make it even safer than it is

now. If they support that, at least they will recognize—in spite of what you might say and what people might say, they realize that we're going to be running on the petroleum system for some time. It will still be the primary source of energy.

Let's say that line is shut down. What happens here in Ontario? What industries are going to be immediately hurt, seriously hurt, probably even the survival of them threatened? But what is it also going to do for the prices of energy? When you get that percentage of your energy through one pipeline, one conduit, what do you do to replace that supply? What other forms of transport and moving are going to have to be required and what's the expense involved and the refineries that are fed by this?

The fuel and the needs are still going to be there, so the demand isn't going to dry up tomorrow or disappear. We're going to have to access that fuel somewhere else. Where will Ontarians, Quebecers and Americans get that fuel from? Where will it come from and at what cost?

So what will have been gained—because Michigan has made a political decision, the only thing they will really accomplish is that they will drive up the cost of living for millions of people as a result. They won't make it safer because it has proven itself to be safe. They won't help their own economy because they're actually victimizing themselves, because they've chosen a political route as opposed to an economic route. And I understand: It is not easy sometimes to pick one side or the other. Because we live in a very complex society, the needs and desires of people are not always exactly the same. Some people see one route to get to point A and others see another route to get to point A, and sometimes they're not connected at all. They want the end point to be the same, but they believe there are other ways of getting there.

Then we have to ask ourselves what the possibilities are. What are the possibilities? Line 5 maintains the possibilities that we have today. There will be a time we all get that. Everything has a beginning and an end, even me, and there will be a time when we move to something else. But this is not that time. This is not the time. This is a time for us to speak unified. As my colleague said, this is the time for a Team Canada approach, from the federal government to the provincial governments to the cities and towns across this province, across this country, because while this affects Sarnia today, it affects us all as Canadians when we accept that an agreement that was signed by two sovereign nations at one time can be just torn up because of the political will of one jurisdiction within one of those nations. Then what isn't threatened? Everything is on the table, then. We have to be able to confidently rely on the agreements that are in place.

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This is a time for this Legislature to stand as one. I know we differ on a lot of things, and that's fair. That's democracy. We should differ on a lot of things, because what good would it be to the people if we simply spoke with one voice all the time? No need to open the place up; just send a press release out once in a while. It's a place to have a good, honest and robust debate. But on issues of

such national, provincial and, within this province, territorial significance, this is a time we should speak with one voice.

I want to thank my colleague from Sarnia–Lambton for bringing this forward. I look forward to the support of the opposition on this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's always an honour to rise in the House and debate important issues. Line 5's contribution to Ontario's economy and energy needs is well documented. The government members have certainly documented that today: 53% of our petroleum products and 4,900 jobs in Sarnia are directly affected by line 5. While there are other ways to ship crude oil to Ontario, we've been shipping half of it through line 5 for 65 years.

That's why I find the Premier's negotiating strategy on this perplexing. Questioning the competency of the governor of Michigan and dismissing Michigan's concerns about the health and safety of the Great Lakes is not the most strategic way to negotiate for the people of Ontario. No wonder the governor hasn't returned the Premier's call. My recommendation to the Premier is to take Michigan's concerns about the health and safety of the Great Lakes seriously and address them accordingly as part of a strategic bargaining strategy.

I also believe the Premier and the government need to take this situation as a wake-up call that Ontario needs to diversify its economy, take aggressive climate action and move aggressively to transition Ontario off fossil fuels in a just and responsible way, in a way that supports workers in Sarnia and people across the province.

Speaker, earlier this week I spoke in favour of a private member's bill from the Conservative caucus to reduce polystyrene pollution in the Great Lakes. I was happy to vote for that bill. So I'm hoping that the members opposite take the concerns around other forms of pollution in the Great Lakes seriously as well.

The Great Lakes provide drinking water for 35 million people. The Great Lakes directly support more than 1.3 million jobs that generate \$82 billion in wages annually. The area around the Great Lakes is home to 107 million people on both sides of the border, generating 51 million jobs and US\$6 trillion in GDP. If we threaten the integrity of the Great Lakes, it will have a huge economic impact on the people of this region and, most importantly, on our drinking water.

That's exactly why the Great Lakes Business Network and organization of businesses who rely on the health of the Great Lakes for tourism, farming, fishing and more have raised concerns about the risk posed by line 5. It does us no good to dismiss these concerns.

Thankfully, line 5 has not, in its 65 years, had a spill into the Great Lakes, though it has experienced 33 spills since 1968 that resulted in 1.1 million gallons of oil being spilled along its route.

Speaker, line 5 is a 65-year-old pipeline that was designed to have a 50-year lifespan. The question I have for Enbridge is, what were you doing 15 or 20 years ago

when the life of the pipeline was coming to an end? What were you doing to ensure safety? Where was the Ontario government in questioning, 20 years ago, “Why aren’t we upgrading the safety of this pipeline?” This is especially important when you consider how vital it is to our economic interests and to our energy systems.

A University of Michigan study predicted that if this line would spill—and it hasn’t to this point, thankfully—700 miles of shoreline in the Great Lakes would be affected. The author of the study said that the Mackinac straits is probably about “the worst ... place” you would ever want to have a pipeline spill. It “would have devastating consequences” on our drinking water, our tourism, agriculture, fish, birds and the economy. “It would be an unparalleled disaster for the Great Lakes,” the study concluded. Seventy per cent of the spill would not be able to be cleaned up, and it would likely result in \$6.3 billion worth of damage.

I think we have an obligation, Speaker, as part of our negotiations with Michigan, to say that the two of us are going to work hand in hand to ensure the safety of this pipeline, which is 15 years past its best-before date.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Peterborough–Kawartha, come to order.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: That’s why they’re looking at building a tunnel, but they started the permit process two years ago on a pipeline that’s 15 years past its best-before date.

I’m trying to help you with the negotiations, here, and you’re heckling me.

But anyway, Ontarians have to take these concerns seriously because the risks are high. We have an obligation to mitigate the risk. We owe it to everyone who uses the Great Lakes to do that, and we especially owe it to the 35 million people and present and future generations who rely on the Great Lakes for their drinking water.

Speaker, this is a wake-up call for the province of Ontario about how vulnerable our economy and our energy systems are to be so dependent on one source of energy. It shows how we need to diversify our economy and our energy systems. We especially owe it to the workers in Sarnia to transition to a clean economy.

It starts in Sarnia with the bioindustrial innovation centre, which is developing biofuel alternatives. I’ve toured the facility a number of times now. The Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership says that biofuels are “integrating the established petrochemical and refining industry with Ontario’s ... abundant supply of agricultural feedstocks” to take advantage of Sarnia-Lambton’s “premier location for the development of and investment in bio-based chemistry technologies ... manufacturing” and fuels. So we can take feedstock from Ontario’s forests and farms, much of it waste, and have it replace petrochemicals, keeping money and jobs right here in Ontario. But we need a government who’s going to invest in that transition to ensure those workers actually have a future, Speaker.

One of the members said “some day in the future.” I’ve actually toured one of those plants that’s using made-in-Ontario feedstock to power it.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: Yes, you’re right.

It’s not just agricultural inputs; just last year, a \$30-million new facility being built in Sarnia that will take technology from waste fats and oils and turn it into renewable fuels, including the jet fuel that the government talks about that we need for Pearson International Airport.

What I need the members opposite to understand is that if we’re going to successfully negotiate anything with Michigan, we need a plan to protect the Great Lakes and we need a transition plan away from fossil fuels. We need to understand that climate action is job action. We need to understand that Ontario is perfectly positioned to be the global leader in the emerging electrical vehicle market.

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GM just announced that in the next 15 years, they’re going to be completely not making internal combustion engines anymore. Are we ready as a province for that? We should be, because we have the mining and manufacturing skills, talent and facilities to make that transition happen and for us to be a global leader. We are well-positioned to take Ontario-based products and to make them be the bio feedstock not only for the fuels and petrochemicals in Sarnia, but also in our manufacturing facilities. At the University of Guelph, the bioproducts institute is coming up with all kinds of ways to replace petrochemicals, to use made-in-Ontario and grown-in-Ontario feedstocks to replace plastics in a number of manufacturing processes, including in the automobile sector.

We have the ability right now, we have the technology right now to capitalize on where global investment is going, and that’s in the low-carbon economy. So the question is, do we have the political will in this province to lead the world, or are we going to allow the world to get ahead of us? That’s the question, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I’ve been able to listen to some of this debate this afternoon. To the leader of the Green Party, my question to you, sir, and to those on the left: Do we have the will to stand up for working-class families in this province? I’m proud to say on this side of the House, under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government, with this initiative brought forward today by my colleague and good friend the member from Sarnia-Lambton, that we will always stand up for working-class families in this province.

I am truly grateful for the opportunity to rise today and speak with great concern about the closure of the Enbridge line 5 pipeline. Madam Speaker, as others in this House have already said, many hard-working families across this province have lost their jobs because of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone knows a local shopkeeper, a friend or a family member who has been deeply impacted. These workers have lost their income that supports themselves and their families, through absolutely no fault of their own.

As I've said, this is clearly a challenging time for families, which makes it even more frustrating and discouraging that the governor of Michigan has decided to shut down the Enbridge line 5 pipeline now. To put it simply, Enbridge line 5 is critical to the jobs and lives of thousands of families across Canada and the United States. This short-sighted decision to force a shutdown will cost more than 5,000 jobs locally, and another 23,500 jobs that depend indirectly on this pipeline.

Line 5 provides thousands with a roof over their heads. These are more than just job numbers or numbers on a company's payroll. When we talk about how many people have lost their jobs during this pandemic, we know that this pipeline project will ensure that those jobs get filled. These are moms and dads who need to pay their rent or mortgage, pay for a hockey or ballet membership, do a donation to a local church or a donation to the local women's shelter—real people, families, business owners and workers who want to go back to work and contribute to Ontario's economic recovery. During what is arguably the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes, we must stand up and fight for these workers.

These are good jobs for thousands of working-class families, at a time when jobs are in short supply: welders, pipefitters, labourers, truckers, cement finishers, electricians, crane operators, insulators, and many, many more—skilled trades jobs, well-paying jobs, in many cases the best-paying jobs in all of the skilled trades in the country, that let people provide for their families and support all of our communities. These are good union jobs that pay benefits and pensions and provide stability. They do a lot more than put food on the table; these jobs provide dignity and purpose. That's why I called on, with my colleagues, the government of Michigan to reverse its short-sighted decision. I called on them to join with us and stand up for good, meaningful jobs—jobs in Ontario, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Quebec. We're standing up for families who need to heat their homes, and we're standing up for workers and their families who need our support today.

Our government has been working hard to protect the health and well-being of the people of Ontario. We've worked across ministries, across government and with our federal and municipal partners to offer workers, especially those on the front lines, unprecedented support.

In my ministry, this has included targeted safety visits to workplaces, hiring more inspectors, and working with business and labour to develop sector-specific guidelines that keep people safe.

For those who need it, the first piece of legislation we introduced during these very challenging times was job-protected leave so that workers can stay home and follow the advice of medical professionals.

We have also worked closely with our federal partners to provide 20 paid sick days. That's a full month of income support to ensure workers don't have to choose between their health and their paycheck.

I mention all of this because it demonstrates how our government is supporting ordinary, hard-working people. These are the people the governor of Michigan wants to leave behind with the closure of line 5.

As we begin to safely and gradually reopen our economy, I'm focused on making sure that we leave nobody behind. Our recovery depends on ordinary people laying the foundation for a better tomorrow. As minister, my mission is to spread opportunity more widely and fairly. This is why I have to stand up and stand shoulder to shoulder with these workers.

Madam Speaker, our government believes in ordinary people. They are resilient, and they stick together. Across Ontario, on the job and in the classroom, at new construction sites and in churches and community groups, neighbours are helping neighbours. And they've already begun the building, the research, the work and the giving that will make our province great again.

It is not just our government that is fighting for line 5. We have heard from unions, associations and all levels of government from Canada and the United States, who are calling on the government in Michigan to reverse this decision.

I have part of a letter from the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry's Local 170 union that I would like to share with all of you:

"Canadians rely on line 5 for safe transportation of oil, propane and other energy products.

"Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer's administration is attempting to terminate an easement that has been in place since 1953.

"This action will prevent the safe transport of fuel that heats homes and provides energy to Michigan, neighbouring US states and Canada's two largest provinces.

"Shutting down line 5, even temporarily, would also have a major and immediate impact on crude oil supply for refineries—and, as a result, refined product supply for consumers, motorists and industry. To shut down line 5 is based on an ill-informed, inaccurate, out-of-date and unsupportable opinion."

Madam Speaker, this is just one of the many letters written in support of the continued operation of line 5. It has been made clear from many different voices that line 5's discontinuation will have crippling effects on local economies.

As I've said on numerous occasions, Ontario truly is filled with talent and potential. Our government is working hard to find innovative ways to prepare the people of Ontario for their return to work. We are supporting projects that help remove COVID-19-induced barriers to hiring, training and retraining workers so we can build a stronger labour market. We are trying to modernize the system to meet the looming shortage of skilled workers across the province. We have made good strides, but the decision to end line 5 will most certainly damage the progress that has been made.

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Our skilled workers are the backbone of Ontario and they have proved that since the early days of COVID-19. We want to ensure that the people of our province can succeed and get back on their feet and into the workforce as soon as possible. These workers and their families need

our support now more than ever. We must stand shoulder to shoulder and fight for our workers. We need to move beyond a division between established jobs and emerging jobs. Instead, we should unite around our concern for good jobs.

Enbridge line 5 has operated safely for 65 years and creates work that provides people with dignity, purpose and pride. I firmly believe that it is entirely possible to continue the operation of line 5 in a safe and environmentally responsible way that does not harm people or the planet.

In conclusion, I ask everyone in this Legislature to join Premier Ford, our government and the heroic work of the member from Sarnia–Lambton and stand up for good, meaningful jobs in Ontario by calling on the governor of Michigan to reverse this decision and continue the safe operations of Enbridge's line 5 pipeline.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I am pleased to join my colleagues in this important debate. As we've had more and more discussion regarding the decision on the line 5 shutdown, it becomes more apparent that the threat of fuel shortages and increasing consumer costs, as well as unfortunate job losses, will become a reality.

In my region of eastern Ontario, the St. Lawrence Corridor Economic Development Commission has referenced the closure decision as "devastating" to the region.

The commission's chair, David Beatty, noted earlier this month that line 5 is "a critical energy artery for Ontario." I quote: "From an economic development point of view, this potential closing will lead to significant major disruptions in supply chains, forcing rationing and ultimately driving up fuel prices for all businesses and the average citizen."

In addition, the commissioner notes that "Urgent action is needed by Prime Minister Trudeau to protect the interests, livelihoods and security of Canadians..."

"Of course, this will affect refinery jobs in places like Sarnia—which expects to lose almost 5,000 quality high-paying jobs but indirectly will affect an additional 23,500 jobs" in that region. "Those jobs are held by real hard-working people. These jobs will be lost at a time that thousands of our neighbours, friends and family are already facing employment losses due to the pandemic."

I couldn't agree more with this sentiment. While we are enduring the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not a time to make it more expensive for Ontarians to drive their cars, feed their families and heat their homes.

In December of last year, the Premier wrote the governor of Michigan about his concern. In his letter, the Premier stated that the governor's decision for a May 2021 line 5 closure would create additional economic pressures in our region during a period of heightened economic instability, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Madam Speaker, in June 2019, even the governor of Ohio wrote to Michigan Governor Whitmer highlighting the importance of line 5 for the entire region. The letter noted, "Our states have much at risk in terms of potential

fuel price spikes, lost jobs, airline schedule disruptions and lost transportation project funding."

In September 2019, Premier Ford and Minister Rickford met with Ohio governor DeWine to discuss economic opportunities for Ontario and Ohio. The discussion emphasized the importance of Enbridge's line 5 on the economies of the entire Great Lakes region.

In November of last year, our Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, Minister Rickford, pointed out, "This shutdown will put over 4,900 jobs at risk ... and will jeopardize Ontario and Michigan's energy supply that we rely on daily."

"Pipelines are the safest way to transport essential fuels across ecologically sensitive areas like our Great Lakes."

The minister also noted that we will continue to work with Enbridge and the governor of Michigan to keep line 5 operating in "accordance with the highest health and safety standards."

I know that we here have been actively engaging stakeholders affected by the potential closure of line 5. During a round table discussion conducted recently, the Associate Minister of Energy, Minister Walker, noted our government's collaborative efforts:

"We have been working closely with the federal government in Ottawa to respond to this issue. We know that they understand the importance of standing up for jobs and the economy.

"We believe that taking a united front—a Team Canada approach—with all levels of government being on side to protect our economic and energy security, will lead to a positive outcome."

The minister also has joined my colleague the great MPP from Sarnia–Lambton in reaching out to our federal counterparts to share our concerns about the impacts of the potential closure. In a letter to the federal Minister of Natural Resources, they pointed out the devastating impact of this closure economically, but also to the line 5 unblemished safety record since its installation and that it has been confirmed as fit for service by the US safety regulator.

In contrast, we have seen tragedies unfold in Canada as a result of rail and road delivery systems. As you know, Madam Speaker, I represent the great riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. Like many of my colleagues, my riding resides along the 401 corridor. If line 5 were to close its operations, the alternatives to fuel delivery are estimated at 2,000 trucks per day, every day, to meet current needs. The result will be increased costs, increased congestion on our highways, and increased concerns over vehicle, environmental, and community safety. Eastern Ontario already has the highest per-lane truck traffic in Canada. A traffic increase of this magnitude will not only put further demands on what is a scarce product but it will result in lost lives. In the region that I represent, we see this as placing an unnecessary risk on our communities and the environment.

According to the Canadian Energy Centre this month, the potential line 5 closure would likely increase the price of propane on both the wholesale and retail level.

In a riding such as mine, we have a vibrant and important agricultural community that relies on propane to dry our crops and heat our homes. Over the past few years, we have experienced a couple of incidents that have led to a shortage of propane. Three years ago, the native blockade of the CN main tracks near Belleville created a shortage at the height of the harvest season. Farmers that combine crops lost most of their produce to spoilage. Some farmers chose to delay harvesting until the propane supplies were secured. They say farmers are at the mercy of Mother Nature, and she reared her displeasure that year with an early snowfall. Farmers who held off and didn't take advantage of the short harvest weather window lost a significant portion of their crops because it could not be combined with the snow that was in the fields.

I want to remind people here today that grain and oilseed prices are set in the United States, where fuel and electricity prices are already much cheaper, input costs such as fertilizers and pesticides are cheaper and more technologically advanced than what is available in Ontario, and of course, their delivery is much more predictable. The climate is also warmer, allowing for higher-yield varieties. So, Speaker, our farmers are already disadvantaged compared to our US neighbours, and that does not include the trillion-dollar farm subsidy that the US government provides annually to support the industry. Farming in Ontario is not for the faint of heart, and it is a testament to Ontario farmers' hard work and state-of-the-art farming practices.

Lambton Federation of Agriculture president Gary Martin has noted the impact of a line 5 closure on the agricultural community. He stated in January of this year, "It's going to be a dire circumstance if propane gets turned off." Farmers using propane to heat homes, barns and commercial greenhouses, as well as to dry grain and power irrigation systems, are often in areas without natural gas lines. Even if alternative supplies of propane are found, closing line 5 could mean the fuel will be "so expensive we wouldn't be able to use it on the farms economically," Martin said. This would have a profound impact on rural Ontario.

Earlier this month, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture declared that the "line 5 pipeline is critical, not only for the agriculture industry, but for employment, cost of living, the economy, and ensuring the continued production of thousands of Canadian products that we rely on daily. It's a vital piece of energy infrastructure, whose importance extends beyond the borders of our country and" that of Michigan's.

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In rural Ontario and many areas of our cities, we do not have access to natural gas. Our homes are heated with propane, and I can tell you first-hand the stress of not being able to heat your home. Just over five years ago, a particularly cold winter resulted in a shortage of propane in Ontario and Quebec, and all local distributors were forced to ration their supplies, with some running out completely. Local companies that were able to secure supplies were restricted in filling up competitors' tanks due to liability

issues. I can tell you that replacing propane tanks and associated piping in the middle of January is not easy or economical if you can't find the tanks, the contractors to install them and the provincial TSSA inspectors available to approve them—all required before you can fill the tank up.

Overall, line 5 is critical infrastructure for Ontario. Pipelines are the safest way to transport these essential fuels across ecologically sensitive areas like the Great Lakes. We as a government support the continued safe, environmentally responsible operation of line 5 to maintain energy security and moderate energy prices. I know that the government will continue to work with Enbridge and the governor of Michigan to maintain the safe, environmentally responsible operation of line 5.

Finally, earlier this year, through our pre-budget submissions, a professional engineer arrived on the scene. He talked about not getting ready to get off propane and natural gas, because it would take \$2 trillion to upgrade our grid to accept the cars.

I see my time's run out. I have run out of time. But it's something we have to develop a strategy for.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Today, it is absolutely a pleasure to join the take-note debate. I really appreciate this format in which we collectively, in the parliamentary assembly of Ontario, come together on an issue that is so, so important not only to our economy but to the families of Ontario as well.

I want to commend my parliamentary assistant and friend, our esteemed colleague the MPP from Sarnia–Lambton, for raising this issue with us, educating us on this and rallying the troops, because never before has it been more important to bring together an all-of-Canada approach to make sure an ill-advised decision by the governor of Michigan is overturned.

Just last Friday, I was very, very impressed with the host of people that MPP Bailey brought together on a Zoom call. Over 75 people came together from all levels of government, business and stakeholders from the sector to discuss the impacts that the shutdown of line 5 would have not only on the Sarnia–Lambton economy, but all of Canada.

Again, I was very impressed. We had federal members of Parliament, MPPs from across Ontario and a whole host of labour and chamber representatives talking about the real-life impacts. I have to tell you that we banded together. Without any shadow of a doubt, to quote a particular member in this House, I would suggest to you that we all are joined together—we stand shoulder to shoulder, as someone mentioned earlier—in saying that the governor of Michigan is wrong in her decision to shut down line 5. I would like everyone in the House and watching today to understand why.

From my perspective, there are four main reasons. Shutting down line 5—a lifeline, if you will, to a vital source of energy—would negatively impact our economy, our environment, the agriculture sector, as well as our

families on both sides of the 49th parallel. Her decision to shut down line 5 is an absolute threat to our energy security, quite frankly, and it is unacceptable. Line 5 isn't just a Michigan pipeline; it's a North American lifeline to vital energy sources and it underpins the system in which we run our businesses, we heat our homes and we drive the economy.

I want to talk about a number of things. For those of you just tuning in, what we're debating right now in this take-note debate is the proposed position of shutting down line 5. In fact, the governor of Michigan has already put down her declaration that it shut down. Quite frankly, we all agree on this side of the House that it is a bad decision. The Minister of Labour did a wonderful job outlining the impacts that shutting down line 5 would have on families.

Let's talk about the environment just for a moment. Both Canada and the US are committed to reducing emissions. But think about line 5 for a moment and what the shutdown of it would generate. Line 5 is a system that transports approximately 540,000 barrels of light crude every day—every day. How else, if that line is shut down, are we going to transport that vital source of energy? Well, those 540,000 barrels of light crude translate into a lot of emissions. If this line 5 continues to be shut down by the governor of Michigan, it would mean that over 2,100 trucks per day would be hauling that light crude into the Sarnia–Lambton area. Think of the emissions that those diesel trucks would be putting into the air. It's upside-down, her thinking, the long and the short of it, because the fact of the matter is that if we don't have trucks, then how else would that light crude move? Some would suggest by rail. But all of us remember the tragic accident in Quebec, and we don't want that to happen anywhere. But to transport 540,000 barrels of oil on a daily basis, you would require 800 full rail cars to move. Again, think about the safety. Think about the emissions.

The safest way to move that volume of light crude is indeed by pipeline. Line 5 is over 60 years old, and it's worked. It's done its job. It's proven technology. It's driving so many jobs and has a huge impact on our overall GDP.

When we talk about GDP, I think about one of the sectors in Ontario that is at the top of the driving totem pole, if you will, and that's our agri-food sector. I'll never forget the fall of 2019. I was driving down with my husband to Sarnia. I was going down to celebrate the birthday of Marilyn Robbins. Interestingly enough, her parents are substantial cash croppers in the Brigden area. I was on the phone my entire drive to Sarnia that evening because of the closure of the railroads. I was hearing from businesses and farmers from my riding of Huron–Bruce. I was hearing about their concerns and the cost of not being able to dry their crops that fall.

We got to the celebration, and my husband goes in. I stayed outside for quite some time speaking to my chief of staff. I think he recognized the resolve in which I stood firmly in saying, "We need to do everything we can to make sure those rail lines open up," because farmers across Ontario—and into Quebec, quite frankly—were depending on that vital source of energy. I was so pleased

to see that Minister Mulroney jumped to task and she made a decision with the support of the Premier and our government, just like the Premier is wholeheartedly supporting the member from Sarnia–Lambton in this fight against the closure of line 5, because it means so much to so many.

As I mentioned before, the closure of line 5 is impacting our economy, our environment, agriculture and our families. But I would suggest to you, last weekend there was a huge wake-up call. The storm in Texas woke a lot of people up. People suffered because they did not have heat. People perished because they did not have heat. And what happened on February 20? The governor of Michigan declared a state of emergency so that propane could be delivered at extended hours to make sure her families in Michigan had the heat they needed. Madam Speaker, I would like to suggest to you that perhaps she too has had a wake-up call when she has come to realize that, again, line 5 doesn't just impact us, but it impacts so many families in her own riding.

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I want to use my farm as an example. We use propane on our farm and we have an oil furnace in our stone house. We know full well that in the years to come we're going to have to replace that oil furnace. But, Madam Speaker, we have to replace it with propane. The road I live on does not have access to natural gas. We need propane, and propane is a by-product of that light crude and the natural gas liquids that travel through line 5 into Ontario via Sarnia–Lambton.

I would suggest to you that all of us, if we care about the families of Ontario and across Canada, if we care about our economy, if we care about our environment and, of course, if we care about the agriculture sector that I hold near and dear to my heart, we will stand together and say to the governor of Michigan, "With all due respect, you have made a wrong decision. We encourage you to reverse your decision." Because, again, the fact of the matter is, line 5 is a vital source of energy, and what she has done with her decision is a threat to our energy security, and it is completely unacceptable.

Madam Speaker, it's been a pleasure to speak in this House because this issue is very important to my constituents and businesses throughout my riding of Huron–Bruce and across Ontario. I thank the Premier and I thank the member from Sarnia–Lambton for standing up and fighting for Ontarians and pulling Team Canada together to say, "Governor Whitmer, you're wrong."

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I appreciate that, Madam Speaker. I want, first off, to express gratitude to the member from Sarnia–Lambton for his principled leadership in defence of good-paying jobs in this province.

I think that is the contrast in this Legislature. Our focus obviously is on the health and safety of Canadians, of Ontarians, but we also have to be forward-looking as a Legislature, and I find it quite concerning that this isn't a position and a concern—when it comes to the livelihoods of thousands of Canadians in our own backyard—that this

isn't priority for every single one of us. So I take exception when I hear the Leader of the Opposition, as I was just alerted to, sort of trivializing the importance of these jobs. These are not abstractions. These are not jobs somewhere else. These are jobs in our backyards, these are our neighbours and our friends, and they deserve our support every single day in this Legislature.

What I'd also note is just the interdependence of jobs in the west for economic growth in the east. We are one country. That shouldn't be a hashtag for members opposite. It should be a realization as Canadians that our federation was conceived knowing that interprovincial trade is critical, and western prosperity, the growth of jobs and of the resource sector in all parts of the country, from Newfoundland to Alberta, Saskatchewan, including the mineral deposits, the richness in the north of Ontario and in many other places. We have a duty as Canadians to see this as one country, a pan-Canadian vision for economic prosperity.

Realizing that when pipeline infrastructure was declined in the US, for example, by the current president, that had a direct impact on many manufacturing jobs in this province. The oil and gas sector overall purchased \$6.5 billion of goods and services from all sectors within the province of Ontario; \$3.6 billion in manufacturing goods—\$3.6 billion of Ontario manufacturing, Ontario-made goods. This is a priority, I would submit, for every single Canadian. It should be for every political party in the Legislature. Between 2012 and 2016, Alberta imported \$161 billion of goods and services from this province, again critically driven by the resource sector.

For the member from Sarnia–Lambton, for the Premier of this province and, I would argue, for so many of us, we believe and we support the prosperity and the jobs in every single province, particularly when it means the livelihoods of Ontarians. I feel passionately about this, Speaker, realizing that the decision made by the governor in Michigan on line 5 is one that I think undermines the principle of creating energy independence for the United States, which is vital to their national security: getting oil and gas, getting natural resources from a dependable ally that has been standing with the United States in the context of some of the greatest difficulties that have afflicted the world. And we should be proud of that relationship.

But, beyond the trade relationship that we rely on, it's about the jobs that we are here to defend in this Legislature. While well-intentioned as the governor may have been with the ordering of the line 5 closure, you simply cannot shut out 540,000 barrels of fossil fuels a day that play a critical role in keeping our homes heated in the dead of winter and our economy moving as we look to recovery.

The state of Michigan has ordered Enbridge to shut down line 5 on May 12 of this year. That's just 11 weeks from now. It was built in 1953; it has served our region safely for 70 years. Pipelines are obviously the safest way to transport essential fuels across an ecologically sensitive area. The alternative is rail, which we know in this country the legacy of rail when it comes to moving infrastructure. Particularly, we think of the tragedy in Lac-Mégantic. I

was in Ottawa remembering so fondly and tragically that experience. The fact that pipeline infrastructure safely moves products east and west, north and south is a strength with a high rate of safety. Indeed, we know it's critical to our airport. It's critical to Pearson, which is an airport hub right in our backyard in the GTHA, right here in the province of Ontario, sourcing fuel from line 5 for decades.

I think the threat of the closure of line 5, that it would lead to a higher reliance on foreign sources of oil—this is what I don't understand about how other political parties in this Legislature, and I mean this respectfully—we will disagree on principles. How could any person accept that getting oil, shipping in oil into straits of Montreal, in Halifax, in ports abroad from some of the most egregious human rights abusers of the world should displace Canadian-made oil? The highest ethical labour and environmental standards literally on earth. The New Democrats of Alberta took that position, for crying out loud, and yet we could not have a consensus in this House on the imperative of defending an energy product with the highest ethical standards, with First Nation consultation, and with labour and environmental regulation. This is something we should be proud of. Over the past decades, a dramatic reduction in GHGs per barrel has happened through innovation and partnership with the private sector.

The fact is, this is not a choice of some altruistic wind turbine versus Alberta oil, or oil and gas period. The choice is between the democratic nation of Canada producing it or a regime abroad that systemically abuses their own people and that has no regard for the environment, for labour or for the Indigenous populations of their country. That is a problem. That is a deeply perverse reality of the choice, because it is binary. It is a democratic force for good in the world or it is a tyrannical regime that has done nothing good, that has advanced their own interests at the expense of others. I think we all know where those regimes are and who they are.

Why would anyone, the left or right, especially for political parties of the left that seem to have appropriated the priority of human rights promotion—I think that's something that Conservatives have done throughout our heritage, but, nonetheless, for a party that professes to be that of human rights, how could we be buying oil from regimes abroad that have just egregious human rights abuses against women, against the LGBTQ community, against so many minorities, including religious minorities who are literally persecuted and ultimately ethically cleansed by the very regimes that we're propping up by buying their oil? Shame on any province or country that does that. We should stand up for the values that this country, I believe, that has a multi-partisan reality of advancing democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Now, I feel very strongly about this, because it is a choice. We make a choice. It isn't against an energy future that does not have the need for commodities. We need these commodities. I'd rather the world have more of our energy products that promote the values of this country, a bipartisan reality that that represents a job, a livelihood, and a country and a regulatory regime that actually stands

up for good. I think that could be a truth that all parties should be able to own.

I applaud my colleague the member from Sarnia–Lambton because he has, of his own volition, taken this issue up and advanced it at the highest levels. The fact that, in the midst of COVID, while I think, respectfully, we're all seized with the health and safety of Canadians, with the economic recovery, with keeping schools safe—nothing is more important to every single one of us—we should not pretend for a moment that we have to choose, that it's an either/or proposition. We can protect the health and safety of every single man, woman and child, and yes, we can defend the livelihoods that Canadians need to put food on the table.

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That's what the member from Sarnia–Lambton is doing—he's suggesting that we need to be a forward-looking government that is planning for an economic recovery.

In this party, in this government, we do see a recovery. We do see the potential and the positive of the vaccine and all that can bring when it comes to our broader economic recovery, and how that also supports mental health and so many other important imperatives for a society, for an economy.

I commend the Premier for his leadership in raising this issue and making it clear to Governor Whitmer that her decision to shut down line 5 will not just hurt a very important, principal ally of Michigan; it will hurt her own citizens and taxpayers.

We need to continue to stand up for our energy and stand up for our jobs.

I continue to applaud and stand with the member from Sarnia–Lambton for his leadership in this Legislature and in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's an honour to join in this take-note debate today.

I also want to thank my colleague the member from Sarnia–Lambton. Without him bringing this major issue to our attention, this just wouldn't be happening at all.

As some of you may know, I used to work at Union Gas. I was there for about 12 years.

On January 1, 2019, Enbridge Gas Distribution and Union Gas joined to become Enbridge Gas Inc.

There was a scrum today, and the leader of the NDP made a comment: "It's really troubling when you see a government use a crisis like a worldwide pandemic to focus on things that, you know, that are not, well, you know, that are not appropriate for the people of Ontario, and that, you know, that's something that they're going to have to answer for."

Well, I've got news for the leader of the official opposition: I'm concerned about the people in my riding, about how the shutting down of line 5 will affect not only the direct and indirect job losses but will also have a negative economic impact in many different sectors.

That's who I answer to, and that's why I'm accountable, as well.

Speaker, line 5 is one of many different lines, spanning about 1,000 kilometres. It's vital for connecting pipelines all across Canada in conjunction with the United States.

Also, its importance stems from connecting two major nodes from the Enbridge Pipeline System and ensuring the proper destinations are met, branching off to go around the northern and southern shores of Lake Michigan.

The location of this pipeline is so significant that the line 5 pipeline is actually split into two identical 30-inch-diameter pipelines that run parallel to each other, approximately 1,000 feet apart. Located just west of the Mackinac Bridge, these two pipelines cross one of the narrowest parts of the Mackinac straits, which connect Lake Michigan to Lake Huron.

In December 2013, line 5's capacity was increased, again to accommodate an increase in demand, by 50,000 barrels per day without directly modifying the pipeline resting under water. For context, that's just over three Olympic-size swimming pools of additional flow per day, which is incredible. In other words, 23 million gallons of liquid flow through these pipelines every day. What do you think is being used to heat your homes, to fuel your cars, to power your electricity demands?

This pipeline is at the heart of our modern need for oil and natural gas. The pipeline remains in good condition and has never experienced a leak in over 65 years of operation. With the pipeline's incredibly durable enamel coating and walls that are three times thicker than average pipes, this ensures these standards are upheld. The pipeline was also built and placed in an area of the straits that would minimize potential corrosion due to lack of oxygen and the cold-water temperatures.

But enough of the pipeline details; I'm sure you're all very aware of them.

Let's talk about the impacts that the pipeline shutdown would actually have on you and me and every consumer in this province. I look at this situation as a Team Canada/Team North America approach. Losing is not an option. We all must move in the same direction, with one common goal.

Line 5 alone delivers 65% of the propane demand in the Upper Peninsula and 55% of Michigan's propane need. Where would Michigan get 756,000 US gallons a day worth of propane so quickly without line 5? What would happen during the 14.7-million-US-gallon-a-day shortage of gas, diesel, jet fuel? Think of all the people, businesses and employment opportunities that rely on this constant daily supply.

Just saying the shutdown of line 5 creates problems within the job sector is one thing, but let's talk about statistics and actual, real-life examples to put into context how negative this outcome is for our economy. One of the main reasons close to home will be all the impacts in Sarnia, Ontario and within the Sarnia–Lambton area. Enbridge predicts that the shutdown decision will impact close to 5,000 jobs, most of which will be local in the Sarnia area. Sarnia is home to three of the four refineries

in Ontario, and they heavily rely on a constant supply of crude oil through line 5 to keep up with this high demand.

What do you think would happen when we're not going to have the input usually required? Most likely cut backs and lay offs to continue being profitable—hmm, not so sure. These job losses will be felt throughout the whole community and throughout Ontario's economy, not to mention how many people are struggling with COVID-19 already. Adding these unemployment numbers to an already large statistic will only make our economic recovery that much more difficult.

These are just a few of the economic impacts here at home. But how about the ones with our neighbours to the south? Enbridge predicts that this shutdown would have a 45% loss of crude oil from the refineries located in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania, not to mention our own Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Just a closure of one of those refineries could result in a revenue loss of close to \$5.4 billion. That would greatly affect the annual economy of Ohio and Michigan. And don't forget about the loss of thousands of direct and contracted skilled trade jobs, thousands more people being laid off, plus the economic revenue of \$5.4 billion is a pretty big deal that I'm not in favour of, that's for sure.

This pipeline creates jobs. That's why we're trying to, as a government, develop economic growth, especially in these struggling times. Why would we want to take that away? In total, it seems that 10 refineries would be affected by this pipeline shutdown—10. This would then have a direct impact on fuel prices, as has been mentioned by my colleagues in the past.

I'm sure that you're familiar with the feeling of high gas prices and their indirect impact on our economy and economic development. People don't like going out and spending more money for gas prices, especially when they're really, really high, and we're starting to see those prices escalate. People don't like travelling if airline prices are too high. Companies must compete with an increase in shipping costs, and that may raise prices of merchandise. People may turn down job opportunities that would normally be cost-effective to transit to. All in all, people, in the end, will have less money in their pockets, which is not what our government wants to see.

Let's talk about the impact on the agricultural industry as well. This shortage of propane threatens farmers' ability to dry grain, to power irrigation systems, to heat their homes, to heat their barns, to heat their greenhouses. In Quebec, Premier Legault described the situation back then—that's back in 2019—as an emergency, and rightfully so. In Quebec alone, propane supplies the fuel for 29% of activities in the agricultural sector. The cost of crop loss would be detrimental without propane. I want to highlight the fact that this problem in Quebec was a shortage caused by the CN workers' strike. But a complete shutdown of line 5 would be much, much worse, as it supplies crude oil to plants that generate approximately 1,200 million gallons of propane and butane annually, of which 200 million gallons are shipped to Michigan and stimulate their agricultural economy.

Economically, farmers wouldn't be able to use propane on their farms and would have to spend thousands just to upgrade their equipment. The burden of these costs might mean a loss of profitability in an agricultural sector that's already struggling. What do you think would happen to the price of local produce when farmers are still trying to keep their heads above water and make a decent living? Farmers and agricultural workers all around are very worried about this decision. It will impact all of us in such a significant way. Our infrastructure is built around this pipeline. It can't just be stopped without having serious negative consequences.

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Let's think about this logically for a moment. With no pipeline, we're going to have to go back to how we transferred oil and natural gas before line 5: with trucks and tankers. Do you want to know roughly how many trucks would be needed to replace one pipeline to keep up with demand? Quick math: The pipeline now transfers about 540,000 barrels of oil or natural gas per day, and on average, a tanker truck only holds about 190 barrels. That's over 2,800 new trucks per day just to move that oil. Think about the environmental impacts that those trucks would have on our ecosystem, and think about the cost implications to move all of that on trucks. Think about the road space and the infrastructure that is being used.

Listen, Speaker, a pipeline shutdown doesn't make any sense. With all these concerns in addition to the significant impact that this will have also on the agricultural industry, job sector and the environment, this shutdown will cause more problems than it will solve, and therefore, we should not support their choice to shut down line 5. Let's keep it going.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Donna Skelly: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to speak to the critical importance of the line 5 crude oil pipeline to Ontario's economy, and to raise the alarm about the governor of Michigan's decision to revoke the 1953 easement for the dual pipelines in the Straits of Mackinac, a decision that would effectively shut down Enbridge's line 5 in May.

The looming shutdown is only weeks away. If the closure occurs, it would be disastrous for local economies in southwestern Ontario and the economy of Ontario as a whole. Enbridge line 5 supports a minimum of 23,000 direct and indirect jobs in the Sarnia area alone. The pipeline also supports \$28 billion in trade revenues.

As my colleague the member from Chatham-Kent-Leamington pointed out, the leader of the official opposition doesn't seem to recognize what is at stake with this issue. Just moments ago in a news conference, the leader of the official opposition said, "I mean, there is no doubt that this project is one that's going to get some attention, although there's no role, really, for the provincial government here. This is a federal matter. So, again, another question as to why the government is putting this forward when all of their focus should be on COVID-19."

I think protecting jobs is something we should be focusing on. Again, from the leader of the official opposition just moments ago: “It’s really troubling when you see a government use a crisis like a worldwide pandemic to focus on things that are not appropriate for the people of Ontario and that’s something they’re going to have to answer for.” Protecting jobs is not appropriate for the people of Ontario—something I think the Leader of the Opposition will have to answer for.

Line 5 is a primary artery that connects North American crude oil to refineries in Ontario. The line 5 pipeline enables the secure and reliable flow of light crude oil, light synthetic oil and natural gas liquids to refineries and a natural gas liquids fractionator in Sarnia. This fractionator ensures a reliable supply of propane for Ontario, Michigan and eastern Canada. Line 5 has a capacity to transport 540,000 barrels per day and is a critical piece of energy infrastructure for Ontario’s refining and petrochemical sectors. This pending shutdown will jeopardize an energy supply that Ontario and Michigan rely on daily. Without line 5, Ontario and the entire Great Lakes region would face a 45% reduction in the pipeline supply of petroleum.

Ontario’s refineries supply the Great Lakes region with essential products like gasoline, diesel and jet fuel. The residents of Ontario would feel a direct hit from the loss of line 5 at their homes and at the pumps. There would be a significant impact on the agriculture, construction and manufacturing sectors. Pearson airport relies entirely on line 5 for its jet fuel. Consumers would feel the impact of the pipeline shutdown almost immediately, and that is why our government is actively engaged and doing everything it can possibly do to keep line 5 operating.

What is the impact of this pipeline shutdown on jobs in Ontario? Well, the closure of line 5 would be devastating. Enbridge estimates the decision to close line 5 would put 5,000 jobs in the Sarnia area directly at risk. The consequences for the province’s economy, already strained by the impact of the pandemic, would be bleak.

Southwest Ontario is a hub for fuel refineries. Refineries employ a highly specialized, highly skilled workforce. To give you a sense of the impact of the closure of line 5, let me take it back to the 1990s. At that time, a critical pipeline from Alberta to Sarnia was decommissioned. That closure resulted in the direct loss of approximately 7,000 jobs. At that time, the community of Sarnia was hit extremely hard.

With the threatened closure of line 5, the southwest region of the province faces a grim future. Predictions are that 4,900 direct jobs will be lost, and that up to 23,000 indirect jobs are at risk. A refinery closure would have devastating effects on Ontario’s petrochemical industry and the economy at a time when Ontario is recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer campaigned on a promise to shut down Enbridge line 5 over environmental concerns, and since assuming office in 2019, the governor and the state’s attorney general have launched numerous legal challenges to the continued operation of line 5. This past November, Governor Whitmer took legal

action to shut down line 5 by revoking an easement granted back in 1953.

Pipelines are the safest way to transport essential fuels across ecologically sensitive areas such as the Great Lakes. US federal regulators have confirmed that line 5 is safe. Our government will continue to work with Enbridge and the governor of Michigan to keep line 5 operating in accordance with the highest health and safety standards. If Enbridge’s line 5 is shut down, the region will be forced to transport fossil fuels by rail, seasonal ships and tankers. This will create dangerous environmental, safety and security risks, and significantly increase the cost of fuel for businesses and consumers alike.

The fact remains that there is a significant need for the energy resources transported through line 5. Line 5 is critical infrastructure for Ontario, its petrochemical industry and the Great Lakes region in its entirety. Enbridge line 5 primarily accesses crude oil produced in western Canada. Loss of line 5 would further exacerbate the issue of constrained pipeline capacity from western Canada. Energy resources transported via pipeline cost less than fuel carried by rail or trucks, and I can’t stress enough the need for reasonably priced fuel at a time when the province is on a path to economic recovery.

Alternatives to replace the pipeline capacity provided by line 5 are limited. Pipeline expansion infrastructure investments would be required, or rail shipping or trucking capacity would need to increase. It’s not clear if such investments would be economically viable. Alternatives would require years to implement and are unlikely to replace the lost pipeline capacity.

The movement of unrefined fuels via pipelines is clearly safer and faster than transporting by rail and road. Line 5 has functioned with a clean safety record since its installation. It’s also been confirmed as fit for service by its US safety regulator.

Unfortunately, we have seen tragedies unfold in Canada as a result of using rail and road to deliver unrefined energy resources. A year ago, a freight train derailed in northwestern Ontario, near Kenora. Several rail cars were leaking crude oil, and 320,000 litres of oil spilled from the damaged cars. Fortunately, in this case, there were no injuries and none of the oil leaked into local waterways.

An unattended freight train carrying crude, of course, caused major damage and a rail disaster in Quebec. Multiple tanker cars caught fire, exploding. Dozens of people were killed and the downtown was levelled.

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In 2015, several tanker cars caught fire after a train carrying crude oil derailed near Sudbury. That incident was one of two that prompted the federal government to issue an order to force trains carrying dangerous goods or petroleum products to slow down.

The disruption of line 5 would result in a daily shortage of over 14 million gallons of gasoline and other transportation fuels. Reduced feedstock supply to Ontario facilities would result in our province becoming more reliant on imports of petroleum products, such as gasoline, diesel and jet fuel.

I once again want to state what we've heard from the leader of the official opposition, because members on this side of the House, under the leadership of the Premier of Ontario, feel much differently. I'd like to stress again—from the Leader of the Opposition: “So, you know, it's really troubling when you see a government use a crisis like a worldwide pandemic to focus on things that, you know, that are not, you know, that are not appropriate for the people of Ontario, and that's, you know, that's something they're going to have to answer for.”

We will be proud to answer for standing—

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to see you in the chair this afternoon. I just want to say a quick hello to the family, who just got home from school, and I believe they popped the TV on to watch the debate.

I want to begin, of course, by thanking the great member from Sarnia–Lambton for his incredible advocacy on this issue. At the end of the day the shutdown of line 5 is about the people who are going to be directly impacted. It's about the nearly 5,000 direct jobs, the 23,000 indirect jobs in Sarnia–Lambton, but it's not just about them, it's also about the province of Ontario: the family that will need to pay more just to fill up their gas tank, the farmer heating their barn with propane while they wait for natural gas expansion, the businesses in my riding that could see fuel and energy costs soar.

Line 5 is a vital pipeline for our province and the entire Great Lakes region. For over 65 years, this line has delivered light oil and natural gas liquids to Ontario, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Quebec. It transports up to 540,000 barrels per day. To put that into perspective, for the state of Michigan, whose governor is making this disappointing decision, that is 55% of the statewide propane needs—over half of their propane needs. Not only would this impact Michigan's statewide propane needs, refineries that rely on line 5 would see 45% less crude oil than their current demand dictates. That demand isn't simply just going to go away. We still need to supply businesses, homes and industries with petroleum.

For anyone who may be thinking the solution is to simply transition to transporting by rail, boat or highway, I want to highlight some clear risks that this would have for our communities and the environment.

Let's look at rail for a second. Despite investments and improvements by our federal government in tanker trains and rail lines, there are a number of examples that demonstrate the dangers this puts our communities in. I know we all remember the Lac-Mégantic disaster back in 2013 which caused the tragic deaths of 47 people. But just last month in Alberta, the village of Field lost power for nearly 24 hours because of a train derailment. In the middle of January, a 24-hour blackout means homes without heat in the dead of winter.

As our Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines has said when we first heard rumblings of Governor

Whitmer's plan, by far the safest way to transport fuels is by pipeline. Now, we've heard the governor cite her concern for environmental reasons as to why she wants to shut down line 5, but these alternatives mean transporting fuels will actually cause a significant increase in environmental concerns, such as extra transports on our highways.

I had the pleasure of joining the member for Sarnia–Lambton, his local chamber of commerce and over 40 participants who will be directly impacted by the shutdown for a round table discussion last week. We heard this very concern from Sarnia and District Labour Council president Jason McMichael.

I've seen figures that show transporting via pipeline lowers greenhouse gas emissions by some 61% to 77% compared to other forms of transportation. Even on the lower end, this shutdown would mean a huge increase in emissions for the Great Lakes region.

It's unfortunate that officials in Michigan have not considered the impact that effectively forcing other jurisdictions to transport their necessary fuels via road, water or rail will have on greenhouse gas emissions.

Enbridge has been open and willing to work with Michigan to address any environmental concerns. The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration has confirmed that line 5 is safe and can continue to transport crude and other petroleum products.

To be completely clear: If our government did not believe that line 5 could continue operating with the highest health and safety standards, I do not think that we would be having this debate here on a Thursday afternoon. In everything we do, health and safety is at the forefront. I don't think the member for Sarnia–Lambton would be as fierce an advocate for this if it put anyone in his community at any kind of risk.

We all know that this region is a hub for fuel refineries, with over 4,900 jobs linked directly to line 5. These are good-paying jobs that are highly technical and require skilled trades training. In a region with a population of around 70,000, almost 24,000 indirect jobs are at risk with the shutdown of line 5. That is almost 30% of the workforce.

A third of families could see their household incomes decrease, making it harder for them to feed their children or keep a roof over their head. This is unfathomable even in the best of times, and at a time when all Ontarians are continuing to face this pandemic, this is unconscionable. Not only are we facing major job losses in Sarnia–Lambton, there will be huge cost increases across the province, including in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga.

I hear constantly back home about the need to expand access to natural gas in our rural communities. For a moment I want to touch on our government's natural gas expansion policy and all the progress we've been able to make in just two short years.

I'll remind all members of this House that one of the earliest pieces of legislation that our government put forward was the Access to Natural Gas Act. This bill put in place our expansion plan to bring access to natural gas to tens of thousands of rural residents, saving them

between \$800 and \$2,500 annually. Already we are moving forward with the second phase of this expansion plan, which will allocate \$130 million over the next three years.

We are working closely with private sector partners to get this plan in place as quickly as possible, but until then many rural families, farmers and small-town businesses are relying on alternative heat sources like propane and oil. These are already more costly than natural gas, and should the shutdown of line 5 move ahead they are only going to get more expensive. These additional costs are only going to add to the challenging situation many families and businesses are finding themselves in due to the pandemic.

I want to speak specifically to our farmers, as agriculture is the backbone industry in my riding. There are over 1,400 farms in Waterloo region, the majority of which are in the three townships that I represent. They rely on fuel for nearly all of their daily operations, from feeding livestock to harvesting crops and heating their barns. Farmers have already seen their costs for fuel go up over the years, but the closure of line 5 would be detrimental to their operations. These are the farmers that put food on each of our tables, and the ones that feed our cities. Not only does this mean an increased cost for farmers, it also means higher grocery bills for every family here in the province of Ontario. The closure of line 5 will have a domino effect, not only across our province but across the entire country.

I want to close out my short 10 minutes by recognizing that our federal government has not been idle. Like many of my government colleagues, I have written to my federal counterpart, the Liberal MP for Kitchener–Conestoga, as well as to the Liberal MP for Waterloo, requesting their assistance and advocacy. As we've heard today, the closure of line 5 affects us all, not just the people of Sarnia–Lambton or those on the Michigan-Ontario border.

The Prime Minister has gone on record recognizing the importance of line 5 for our economy here in our country, and our Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines and the associate minister of energy have communicated to their federal counterpart that we stand at the ready to support the federal government when it comes time for their advocacy on these important issues. While I await a response from my federal colleagues, I am eager to work with them to push for a sensible and equitable outcome that benefits Ontario, Michigan and the entire Great Lakes region while mitigating against the consequences we face should the pipeline shut down entirely. We are all on the same side here, and I hope that my local MPs will join with me in standing for this vital infrastructure.

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I'll finish off once again by thanking the member for Sarnia–Lambton for pushing this issue to the forefront of the Legislature here this afternoon. I'm pleased to see so many members in this House rise to speak to it here today. We are sending a clear message about just how important line 5 is to the province, and I'm cautiously optimistic that all of our advocacy will help to safeguard Sarnia–Lambton's local economy and Ontario's energy sector.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Lindsey Park: It's really a great opportunity to rise and speak about this important topic that impacts not only Ontarians but Canadians, as well as our American neighbours all across the Great Lakes region.

Speaker, I'll be frank: The decision by the governor of Michigan to shut down Enbridge's line 5 pipeline in the Straits of Mackinac is short-sighted and ill-informed. It also hurts everyday people not only in Michigan but across the Great Lakes region, including in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. For that reason, this decision has evoked widespread concern and criticism—rightly so—across jurisdictions, levels of government, sectors and across partisan lines.

I won't reiterate all the comments my other colleagues have made but I think we can sum it up as its clear shutting down this line will result in a loss of jobs, a loss of reliable and cost-effective energy, a loss of revenue for important sectors of our economy that are important to our economic recovery and the loss of regional and provincial economic advantages. In normal times, this would be a reckless policy decision, but during this current economic climate, it is simply wrong.

In my own backyard, there are rural communities that have been waiting for years to get connected to natural gas, for example, because the energy alternatives are much costlier and without them, their economic growth as a community is hindered.

Just this last December, for the very first time residents and businesses on Scugog Island in my community started to receive their first connections to a new gas pipeline built by Enbridge. That pipeline connects my constituents to affordable natural gas to heat their homes and run their businesses. Speaker, our government is in favour of pipelines such as line 5 and the one on Scugog Island that keeps energy supplies safe and affordable for people and businesses all across this province.

Now, I must say, I am deeply disturbed to learn of some of the comments of the leader of the official opposition today. I gather that, in a press conference this afternoon when asked about line 5 and what her view on it was, she said, "Well, there's really no role for the provincial government here." Can you imagine the member from Sarnia–Lambton, if his response when constituents, who are losing their jobs, pick up the phone to his office, was, "There's no role for the provincial government," when 23,000 jobs are being lost or more across the province? Can you imagine? What if that had been the member for Oshawa's response when GM jobs were being lost in her community? What if that had been my response? That's poor representation and, frankly, it's an abdication of responsibility.

In contrast, thank God we have a Premier who won't look the other way when thousands of jobs are on the line. As our Premier said in his letter to the governor of Michigan recently, "To require Enbridge to cease operations of the dual pipelines by May of 2021 would threaten over 1,000 unionized jobs in Michigan and Ohio

alone. Furthermore, the largest economic impact would be the shortfall in regional fuel supply.” This is across the Great Lakes region. “Michigan would need to find an alternative supply for anywhere from 4.2 million to 7.77 million US gallons per day of refined products (i.e., gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and propane). This would create additional economic pressures in our region during a period of heightened economic instability as a result of the global COVID-19 crisis.” That’s our Premier, and that’s leadership.

Speaker, I want to speak about an angle that some of my colleagues haven’t covered yet. On a personal note, I spent a few years living in Detroit, Michigan, when I was there on a sports scholarship, playing the highest level of women’s hockey in the US. I got to know the city, the state, the people and what they care about. They understand the importance of affordable energy and the thousands of jobs that are connected to the energy industry in that state.

This is not about the people of Michigan versus the people of Ontario; we’re all on the same page here, and we all just want to work together to make sure there are jobs across the Great Lakes region.

I’d like to read a quote from the Michigan Laborers’ District Council on this issue, from the Detroit News on February 16, 2020:

“There’s overwhelming consensus that the right move for Michigan, for the Great Lakes, and for our state’s energy needs is construction of a new tunnel”—referring here to Enbridge’s proposed new tunnel under the Straits of Mackinac to house a replacement pipeline. “Democrats support it. Republicans support it. Business groups support it. Labour unions support it. We support it in the U.P. where we rely on the propane moving through line 5 to heat our homes and job sites. We support it in Detroit and across the Lower Peninsula where the fuel the pipeline provides powers industries that provide nearly 50,000 jobs....

“The time for action is now. Let’s support Michigan workers, stand with labour, end the stall tactics, and build the Great Lakes tunnel.”

That was from Geno Alessandrini, business manager of the Michigan Laborers’ District Council.

I want to conclude by thanking our Premier and, frankly, Premiers across the country; it has been a united front.

I want to thank the federal government for their continued leadership in raising this issue at international tables.

I want to thank the Premier, our Minister of Energy, our Associate Minister of Energy, as well as the member for Sarnia–Lambton for their leadership on this file, for their public support and advocacy, rather than the silence that we’re seeing from other parties in this House.

On this side of the House, we will continue to be a united front in support of good-paying Ontario jobs and the people they lift up.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Rod Phillips: Thank you to all my colleagues for the passion that has been shown on this side.

I’d like to also comment to the leadership of the House, including the leadership of the House on the opposition side, about the value of these debates. I think it’s an important addition that this particular sitting has brought to bear and reflects on an opportunity for all of us to speak about important issues of the day.

Madam Speaker, as we’ve heard from many in the Legislature today, the line 5 energy corridor is vital. It’s vital from the perspective of our collective economic infrastructure. It’s vital to the Sarnia petrochemical manufacturing complex that is an important part of our overall economy. It is vital in terms of the provision of natural gas liquids, which provide propane and other important hydrocarbon products that fuel our economy.

And as we’ve heard, there are up to 30,000 direct and indirect jobs just in the Sarnia area that are affected by this.

A number of people have commented on the role of the member from Sarnia–Lambton—and I wouldn’t miss that opportunity. Early in my career as an elected official, he was kind enough to invite me to Sarnia. Anyone who has spent time with the member from Sarnia–Lambton in Sarnia knows how well he knows his community. Those old enough will remember the King of Kensington, when he used to walk around and everybody knew his name. That is the member from Sarnia–Lambton in his riding.

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He took the time when I was there—dealing with some environmental issues, dealing with some First Nation issues—to educate me about the importance of the petrochemical industry and the importance and the evolution that Sarnia is going through in this regard. I’d had the benefit, as someone who had been educated and lived and worked in southwestern Ontario, to spend time in Sarnia and Lambton and across that region. Anyone who has spent that time there knows that the hard-working people in Sarnia and in the region were part of the origins of the gas and oil industry, not just in Canada but in North America—in Petrolia, not that far from where we were—and that those people have among the greatest expertise in the world when it comes to the safe handling of these kinds of chemicals.

Madam Speaker, the source of concern for this debate, as we heard, has been the decision by Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan to withdraw permits that had been long-standing over 60 years, and permits that had seen the safe transport and utilization of the products that came through the Straits of Mackinac. Speaker, this action by Governor Whitmer is not the result of concerns from the regulators either in Canada or in the United States who have overseen the safe use of those products and the safety of the pipeline. These are certainly not in line with, and may indeed violate, a number of international treaties that Canada and the United States are signatories to which encourage free, safe trade in our two countries. By that I refer to the transit pipelines treaty of 1977 and I refer to the more recent US-Mexico-Canada free trade treaty, both of which guarantee free access for these kinds of products

and both of which, clearly, are being contended with now from a legal perspective, as the governor's comments may be in violation of them.

No, Madam Speaker, the reason we are having this debate is because of a campaign commitment made by the governor of Michigan. In this regard, we all, as elected members, can feel some sensitivity as elected officials. We understand on this side of the House that the governor made 11 key commitments, and one of them had to do with this in the heat of the 2018 campaign. But as a result of that, I want to assure this Legislature that this issue has been at the forefront of discussion, not just now, but because of the work of the member of Sarnia–Lambton, because of the work of the Minister of Energy, because of the Associate Minister of Energy's work and because of the work of the Premier, this agenda item has been on our radar for a considerable period of time.

In fact, I was reflecting earlier today that in the spring of 2019, when I was honoured to represent the province on behalf of the Premier at the Great Lakes governors' conference that was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, we spoke about important environmental issues and we spoke about important economic issues. At the request of the Premier, I raised this issue directly with Governor Whitmer. We spoke about it. I made it clear how important this issue was, not just from the perspective of Ontario, not just from the perspective of Quebec and eastern Canada, but from the perspective of the Great Lakes states and provinces, which we were all there to discuss.

Be very clear: The governor understands this government's position and understands it from the perspective of working people as well as the overall economy. Now, it has been referenced earlier by the minister of consumer and corporate affairs the irony of the fact that just this week that same governor was asked and required to declare a state of emergency in her state of Michigan to support Michiganders because of propane shortages, particularly in the Upper Peninsula part of the state of Michigan.

This propane that is now an essential need for Michiganders is propane that comes from Sarnia. If the governor has her way and if line 5 is closed in May, then these shortages won't just affect Michigan, won't just affect the Upper Peninsula, won't just affect the Lower Peninsula, but they'll affect Ontario, they'll affect Quebec and they'll affect all of the Great Lakes states. That is why I think it is so important and appropriate that this Legislature is taking the time to have this discussion today to put the government of Ontario, to put the legislators of Ontario—I would encourage our colleagues on the other side of the House to take advantage of this—on the record about the importance of this to the economy and the importance of this to people in Ontario.

Madam Speaker, it's not just in this House and it's not just the member from Sarnia–Lambton, our Associate Minister of Energy, the Minister of Energy and the Premier who have been on the record with their concerns. We've heard today about the broad coalition of individuals

who are concerned about the closure of the line 5 energy corridor.

One of them, again another gentleman and long-time elected official whom I'm well familiar with, is the mayor of Sarnia, Mike Bradley. Mike Bradley has sometimes been a great fan of what this government does; and occasionally Mayor Bradley lets us know when he has a concern. But on this, he is united with this government. He talked about this like “dropping a neutron bomb” on his community.

We've heard from Nathalie St-Pierre of the Canadian Propane Association talking about the very basic logistical challenge of getting propane for the trucks to transport the fuel. This is not even about propane to put in the trucks; it's about propane to be able to have the trucks that run on propane work and transfer the liquid propane that would be required.

Joe Cormorant—I know our colleagues across the aisle will know the former NDP MP, who is now our government's consul in Detroit—was talking about this being a significant threat to both economies.

Crispin Colvin: We've had a number of people talk about the importance of agriculture, and the critical importance of propane in Ontario's rural communities—again, the OFA weighing in.

Pat Dillon—not always a friend of this government, but with whom I do have a many-decade relationship—the business manager of the provincial building trades council, was talking about the 30,000 jobs. I had a chance to speak to Mr. Dillon yesterday. I said to him, “Pat, why is it that we can't get the kind of consensus we need on this?” I respect Mr. Dillon's many, many years in having these kinds of conversations. He said that nothing could be more important than this Legislature speaking as one. I know he reached out to some members in some of the other parties to emphasize that.

Nothing could be more important than us all sending a clear message to Ottawa. As the member from Kitchener–Conestoga mentioned, the federal government has been active on this and the relevant minister has been active on this. We know that our Prime Minister had a meeting with the President of the United States this week. We don't know all the content of what was raised at that, but we must hope that, at that level, the federal government will bring this issue to the fore, because we need federal governments and provincial governments, Conservatives, members of the New Democratic Party, members of the independent Liberal Party and members of the Green Party united on this because it is so important for our economy.

Madam Speaker, as I conclude—and it has been mentioned, so I won't spend a lot of time on it—there are of course significant concerns that we all have for the environment and the environment of the Great Lakes. Governor Whitmer raises the concerns about the environment with regard to the pipeline. But as has been mentioned, whether it's related to climate, whether it's related to risks not just to environmental safety but health and safety, transport by train, transport by truck or transport by

tanker cannot be the answer to this; transport by pipeline is the right answer.

We know that there is a fully funded, \$500-million-plus infrastructure project, again, as the member for Kitchener–Conestoga mentioned, that Enbridge will fund to build an even safer and more efficient transmission method. This is important, but we cannot count on this going ahead if the governor's approach is taken forward. So this is not just about what we need urgently now but what we need in the future.

Madam Speaker, an ill-considered decision to close line 5 would mean 756,000 gallons of propane supply and 14.7 million gallons of gasoline, diesel and jet fuel disappearing overnight. That wouldn't just hurt Ontario; that would hurt Quebec, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. That is why this issue is so important. I appreciate the opportunity to debate it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Windsor–Tecumseh on a point of order.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you. I know I can't correct the member's record. But for the sake of Hansard, when the member from Ajax said that the consul general in Detroit was Joe Cormorant, it's actually Joe Comartin. For Hansard's—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. That's not a point of order. You do not have the right to correct anyone else's record but your own.

Mr. Rod Phillips: My notes will be corrected.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm also very pleased to rise in support of MPP Bob Bailey's motion that the House take note of the economic and employment impacts of this potential closure of the line 5 energy corridor.

I do wish to stress that the Nanticoke oil refinery is in my riding of Haldimand–Norfolk. It's a blessing to our community. I have a really good rapport with those who work there, as well as the skilled trades who come in for shutdown. Further, Imperial Oil is an incredible community member, and I've had a long-standing working relationship with our local refinery going back to the 1980s. I served as a consultant to that refinery. It was then owned by Texaco, and my work was helping to establish their employee assistance program and to conduct staff training.

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By way of background, this Nanticoke refinery down there in Lake Erie has got about 300 full-time employees and an average of 200 contractors a day. The employment positions at the refinery range from engineers; technologists; safety planners; the trades, of course; and administrative staff. Any threat to these good-paying jobs would be devastating to my small-town rural area.

As we know, as we've heard during debate, about 25% of the petroleum products sold in Ontario go through the Nanticoke refinery alone. Nanticoke has a variety of essential products: gasoline and diesel, obviously; aviation fuel, asphalt, heavy oil and home heating fuel. As many

will know, Imperial Oil in Nanticoke has gone through a tough time with the shutdown of the CN Rail line over the past four months now between Caledonia and the Nanticoke refinery. We're hoping to see that rail line open up in a few days.

So, Enbridge line 5 plays a critical role in our refining and our petrochemical sector and is a tremendous, tremendous benefit to the Great Lakes region, with a significant volume of crude oil for processing, both by the refinery in my area of Nanticoke and, of course, in Sarnia. And, as we've heard, it provides a cost-effective supply of gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and a wide variety of other petroleum products.

I've met with Imperial on this issue. They are supporting Enbridge in its advocacy for the pipeline and working closely with the trades to amplify these concerns. They engage regularly with our senior government officials as well as the federal government with regard to the importance of line 5 to Imperial and to southwestern Ontario and beyond.

The goal: to see the operation of the pipeline continue.

However, Imperial's teams are also required to work on a combination of contingency plans involving marine, rail and truck to help mitigate any potential impact. These alternatives are costlier and really are incapable of replacing the lost pipeline supply.

The transportation of unrefined fuels via pipelines is demonstrably safer and faster than by railroad and water. Moreover, line 5 has operated with an unblemished safety record since installation and has been confirmed fit for service by its US safety regulators. In contrast, we know of a number of tragedies that have unfolded in Canada and abroad with respect to the use of rail and road.

Although Imperial is watching this situation very closely, they are hopeful there will be no impacts. Of course, it is disappointing that the governor of Michigan is willing to jeopardize this key artery that connects North American crude oil to Ontario refineries. Such moves will not only impact Ontario's energy supply but Michigan's as well, and as well other jurisdictions. Simply put, line 5 is critical to Ontario's economy and to that of our neighbouring jurisdictions, also including Quebec and Ohio.

Just to change gears for a minute: We know that 45% of Canada's propane use takes place in Ontario, and, as has been explained, if we saw such a shutdown there would obviously be a disastrous disruption in fuel supply. It would have severe implications for agriculture, for agri-food and our rural and remote communities. In my role as parliamentary assistant to agriculture, food and rural affairs, I can attest that a line 5 shutdown would have broader impacts for the movement and transportation of primary agri-food, food processing inputs and food and beverage products.

Propane heats homes; it heats livestock barns, especially in rural areas. It powers vehicles like lift trucks, gas grills, generators, and so many other uses within the agricultural industry.

The higher costs of housing livestock and producing food will negatively impact farmers' incomes and could

ultimately be translated into higher prices for food. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture agrees that the line 5 pipeline is critical not only for the agriculture industry but for employment, the cost of living of our citizens, the general economy and ensuring the continued production of thousands of Canadian products that we rely on daily. It's a vital piece of infrastructure and its importance clearly goes beyond our borders.

Speaker, very clearly, the shutdown of line 5 is expected to make it more expensive to produce food in Ontario. It will impact the ability to heat barns and homes, commercial greenhouses, for example, and livestock facilities. Propane is used to dry crops. We don't use corn cribs anymore to dry down grain or to power irrigation systems. If grain is not dried, it rots and is useless in food production. It's difficult to say how much fuel prices will increase for propane, but if you look at what happened in Texas when they experienced a supply disruption, we could see prices that are double or quadruple what farmers and the rest of us could afford to pay.

As we know, a permanent closure of line 5 will lead to an increased reliance on truck, rail and marine transport, leading to higher costs for consumers, growing congestion and increased greenhouse gas emissions, and it will place an unnecessary risk on our communities and on the environment.

Ontario farmers are already dealing with the added stress of the virus. They're working around the clock to protect the health and safety of their farm workers, and this is yet another burden that would be unfair for them to have to deal with. It's a food security issue and a sustainability issue with respect to the food supply in the province of Ontario.

In closing, I unequivocally stand with MPP Bob Bailey: The economic and the employment impacts of the potential closure of the line 5 energy corridor will be detrimental to all Ontarians and many who live in Quebec, the states of Ohio and Michigan, and other jurisdictions. From an economic development point of view, this potential closing will lead to significant major disruptions in supply chains, forcing rationing and ultimately driving up fuel prices for all businesses and the average citizen, who is already dealing with the impacts of the coronavirus.

The governor of Michigan would appreciate that the safest way to transport these essential fuels across ecologically sensitive areas like our precious Great Lakes is by pipeline. Permanently closing line 5 would put a burden on alternative transportation systems—again, increased emissions, increased congestion and unnecessary risk. The economic fallout, as has been explained, is not limited to southern Ontario and would impact the Great Lakes region. This would be unpalatable in ordinary circumstances, but especially so right now. It would be unconscionable to allow this closure in the current economic climate.

This is a top priority. We continue to work with our federal counterparts to protect people and our economy, and I think it's safe to say that our government stands ready to support the federal government in any way

necessary to ensure that this vital infrastructure remains operational for the benefit of all. Given the seriousness of the situation, it's clearly time for all of us to reach out. I've written a letter to the governor of Michigan, as many have in this House. We're allies; they're our best neighbours. Let's work together on this.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate? I recognize the member from Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You can always refer to it as “God's country,” too.

I want to start by thanking the member from Sarnia–Lambton. He has brought this to our attention. It's something that he has championed, and I know that he has said to us privately a few times, “You don't need to give me thanks for this one. Talk about the impacts of line 5 and what's going to happen in your own ridings.” But really, we wouldn't be here today talking about this if he hadn't raised awareness of it, if he hadn't brought it forward. We really do need to thank that member for that.

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I'd also like to thank the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, who is also the Minister for Indigenous Affairs in Ontario, and the Associate Minister of Energy, because the two of them, with the member from Sarnia–Lambton, wrote a letter to the federal government about this.

This is something that is going to have a significant impact in all of Ontario. We need to make sure that we get it right, and we need to make sure that Michigan understands that the current course of action that they are doing is wrong. Quite frankly, it is wrong. They need to change the direction. They have to recognize that shutting off that pipeline is very short-sighted, that it will create economic hardship for North America—not just Ontario, not just Michigan, but for North America.

We're talking about 550,000 barrels of crude oil a day. If we can't send it through a pipeline, something that is the safest way of doing it—we've had a few other members talk about this, but I think it's worth repeating. If we have to transport it by truck, we're looking at between 2,000 and 3,000 transports per day.

We've been talking about this from the economic standpoint, from the job losses, and I'm sure there's going to be someone who is going to say, “That's 2,000 truck drivers.” Where are you going to find them? They don't exist right now in Ontario. We don't have 2,000 people sitting on the unemployment line, looking for a job as a transport truck driver. It just doesn't exist. We don't have 2,000 to 3,000 transport trucks sitting in a field somewhere, licensed, ready to go, waiting for that work. It can't happen. The reality is it just cannot be done.

There are those who will say, “Well, you can send it by train.” We're going to need somewhere around 750 or 800 rail cars to transport it by train. Let's assume for a moment that there are 750 or 800 train tanker cars sitting someplace that could be used. That's fantasy land. They don't exist. There is no possible way that we could do that. Even if we had that much material sitting around doing nothing,

waiting to be used, where do you have the port to transport it to put it into those? It just can't be done. Logistically, it cannot be done.

It's an awful lot of energy that is lost. And there are going to be people who will say, "But we don't need it. There are other ways that we can do that. We don't need that much." Right now in Ontario, between 3.5 and four million households are heated with natural gas or propane, and we're talking about shutting that off. Let's assume for a moment that there were 3.5 million electric furnaces kicking around that could be put into homes. There is no possible way that our grid could handle that much draw on it that quickly.

They're planning on shutting this down in 11 weeks. We have to impress upon Michigan that this is not an appropriate plan.

Line 5 has been in operation for more than 60 years—more than 65 years, actually, I believe. It has proven to be safe. We haven't had a spill from it. Enbridge has a plan to replace it and they have a plan to replace it in a very responsible manner. They're going to tunnel underneath the strait, they're going to put in cement piping, and then they're going to put inside of that the actual pipe that would transport the oil. So if that first pipe broke, it's contained inside of the cement pipe and it's contained underneath in a tunnel.

I've heard the argument that the way that the piping is right now, it's possible for a ship to go overtop and drop its anchor—let's assume that that can happen. The anchor would then have to go through a layer of dirt, go through a cement conduit and also go through the actual pipe itself. I just don't see how it is possible to do it.

We saw, just a couple of years ago, what happened when there was a shortage of propane. It has been talked about by a number of people already, so I won't get into too many of the details on it. Propane is something that's used to dry grain, and grain is absolutely no good—it rots—if it's not dried out. What would happen to the agriculture industry in Ontario if that was the case? What would happen to farmers in Ontario? What would happen to the food supply in Ontario? Without line 5, Ontario, Quebec and Michigan—the entire Great Lakes region—would face a 45% reduction in the supply of petroleum, with propane being one of the things that would be lost.

I talked to a couple business owners in my riding. Paul McMahon owns Starfra Feeds in my community of Douro-Dummer. Paul expressed his serious concerns with the potential closure of line 5 and the significant impact that it would have on the Ontario farmers he works with. He's a feed supply company. He would have a great deal of difficulty running his company that way.

I also spoke to Viren D'souza. Viren owns D'souza Farm Systems, and it's located in Peterborough as well. This is what he said to me: "If a pipeline is shut down fuel has to find another path to market. Typically, this involves more rail cars, and as we've seen in the past, they are subject to various political and seasonal restrictions for shipping. Fuel rail cars typically displace grain cars (among others)"—let's back that one up a sec: "Fuel rail

cars typically displace grain cars...." I was talking about how we would have difficulty with our grain farmers not being able to dry their grain. On top of that, if they were able to get their grain dry, they no longer can get it to market, because it's more economically viable for the rail companies to ship fuel than it is for them to ship grain.

What happens to our food supply, then, when we can't get one of the base products that we need for so many different foods to market? How will that affect me in Peterborough? I've got Quaker Oats. Quaker Oats makes pancake mix. They also make a great cereal called Cap'n Crunch; I love Cap'n Crunch cereal. When they make Cap'n Crunch in Peterborough, man, you love those days, because the whole city smells like Cap'n Crunch. It's awesome—but I digress. All of their raw product comes in by rail. They employ a little over 2,000 people. If they can't get their base product in to make the products that they sell, because they're shipping fuel instead by train, what happens to Quaker Oats in Peterborough?

That Quaker Oats facility is more than 100 years old. If they can't produce it, then PepsiCo finds one of their other plants to do it. It's an economic loss for my community, which already has 13.9% unemployment. Our second- or third-largest employer would be in jeopardy, not because of anything they did wrong, not because of the marketplace for us, but because of a decision made in Michigan, a short-sighted decision that would have massive negative repercussions all across Ontario.

It's incumbent upon all of us to stand up and say this cannot happen. We need to do everything that we can do. We need to advocate, however we need to advocate, to say, "We need this," because the long-term repercussions would be massively devastating to an economy that's already in jeopardy.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

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Mr. David Piccini: It's good to rise today to speak in favour of this take-note debate.

I would like to start by thanking the member from Sarnia-Lambton. He has been an absolutely ferocious champion for his constituents. I appreciate the hard work he has done in working with all members of this Legislature and, certainly, briefing all members on this side of the House about the devastating economic impact, the devastating human impact that this short-sighted decision by the governor of Michigan will have on the people of Ontario and, most importantly, on so many people he has the privilege of representing in Sarnia-Lambton.

Madam Speaker, I'll briefly pivot to an aside. I had really hoped that this debate would bring consensus in this Legislature. I'll just share in the concern of my neighbour the member from Durham over comments made by the leader of the New Democratic Party. When asked about the importance of line 5 and the importance of Enbridge in the community, the Leader of the Opposition said, "There's no role, really, for the provincial government here. This is a federal matter." She went on to say later, "We should see the government focus on things that, you

know, that are not, you know, that are appropriate for the people of Ontario.”

Well, I have a message to the Leader of the Opposition. When it comes to the 28,000 jobs in Ontario affected by this short-sighted decision—absolutely right; this is important and appropriate for the Premier and the government of this province. And Premier Ford will never abdicate his responsibility to stand up for those 28,000 jobs—to stand up as servants for those 28,000 people we represent in this place.

I'm so proud to represent a rural community. Agriculture is the main employer in Northumberland–Peterborough South. I think it's important to note the important role that line 5 plays in ensuring our food supply, in supporting our farmers.

As my other neighbour, the member for Peterborough–Kawartha, pointed out, when you take a drive from Port Hope to Brighton, up north through Keene, Norwood, around Rice Lake, you'll see many grain farmers. We know the important role that grain farmers play in our communities and the important role that this fuel plays in drying that grain—when we're shutting down this line, in an overnight, irresponsible decision, there's no transition to a clean economy; in fact, it's a regression to a much dirtier form of power—and of supporting industries that are vital to the lifeblood of this economy. That means that we'll be transporting via rail, via trucks. As the member for Peterborough–Kawartha pointed out, when we start transporting this fuel via rail, what does that mean for those grain farmers, for our other agricultural producers, for food processing, for the agri-food industry? That means that they can't get their product to market because, as he rightly said, for the rail companies it's much more economically viable and much more—there's a cost incentive to transporting the fuel via rail. I think we've seen countless examples in the history of this nation that that is the irresponsible thing to do.

Without question, we have to transition to a clean economy, but putting 28,000 Ontarians out of work overnight by shifting the transportation of this fuel to much more irresponsible forms of transportation—methods that are much more irresponsible for the net outcome on our environment—that does nothing to support our environment. Putting 28,000 Ontarians on food stamps does nothing to support the people of this province. These are good jobs, many of them unionized jobs, in the province of Ontario.

We join with the New Democratic Party in Alberta, we join with labour union leaders across Ontario, we join with the federal government in saying that this is irresponsible, this is short-sighted and this does nothing to improve our economy and to improve our environment.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to speak a bit more as well about manufacturing and quote a recent conversation I had with the Northumberland Manufacturers' Association and their president, Darla. We spoke at length on the impact that line 5 would have on our manufacturing sector. Manufacturers are watching this situation closely as they believe this will have an effect on a supply chain that is already

struggling in grappling with the effects of COVID-19. She asked me to communicate a message, and I'm going to communicate that overall message here: “This closure”—in speaking about the closure of line 5—“manufacturers in my community say this is a huge hit to Ontario's energy and manufacturing industry, and when one of us hurts, we all hurt.” That is why so many, particularly on this side of the House, have stood up today to speak about this regressive decision and the closure of line 5 and the impact that this will have on farmers in my community, on manufacturers in my community.

I think fondly to manufacturing—the manufacturing might in Cobourg and throughout Northumberland–Peterborough South. As the member for Peterborough–Kawartha said, I fondly think of growing up on the soccer fields, which are former soccer fields that still exist but are also a home now to the Cobourg Community Centre.

When Weetabix is making their cereals—I fondly recall playing and those wonderful smells in the 90th minute, as wonderful as the victories when we were defeating those downtown Toronto soccer clubs—the smell of so many of my favourite cereals, and those are made in Cobourg. Those are made by workers in Northumberland–Peterborough South. So I'd like to salute them, thank them for the work that they do and say that you will always have a friend in this government when it comes to standing up for your jobs and when it comes to standing up for the broader economy, the broader supply chains, the broader flow of fuel that keeps you employed and that keeps our economy moving.

Madam Speaker, I'd also like to take a step back and look at the overall impact on the province of Ontario and on this economy. Prosperity in the west means jobs in the east. In 2016, the oil and gas sector purchased \$6.5-billion worth of goods and services from other industries in Ontario. Madam Speaker, that's \$3.6 billion from manufacturing; \$620 million from professional, scientific and technical services; \$610 million from the finance and insurance sector. We must work together. We must understand that as blood flows throughout our body, fuels and the economy are interconnected in our great nation. When the west is succeeding—our friends in Alberta, our friends throughout western Canada—we're succeeding here in Ontario.

I think there are no industries that better understand the need to transition to a clean economy and to take an important and responsible approach to doing so. Relying on shipments of oil and petroleum products from regimes that have some of the worst human rights records in the world does nothing to support our environment. And I think all members of this House—we stood together to stand up against bigotry, hatred, racism, Islamophobia. We've done it all together, to stand up for our LGBTQ community. Instead, these regressive decisions mean we're going to be dependent on regimes that have no respect—no respect—for the principles of equality that we embrace and hold so dear in this country and in this province.

I'd like to close by thanking Enbridge for the work that they've done: for the work that they've done and their

commitment to environmental sustainability and responsibility, for their commitment to net-zero GHGs by 2050, for their commitment to reducing GHGs by 35%—

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The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Thank you. Further debate?

Hon. Bill Walker: I'm truly honoured to rise today as the Associate Minister of Energy in support of line 5 and the people whose jobs, families and communities depend on the continued safe operation of this pipeline.

I want to begin by recognizing the great advocacy by my friend the MPP for Sarnia–Lambton, affectionately known in this chamber as PMB Bobby Bailey. He has been an absolute champion for the people in his community, and I commend him for working around the clock to advocate for a united front in the fight to save line 5. He has been pushing from day one to ensure that we're all aligned on the critical importance of line 5 to Ontario's economy and to our country's economy and, most importantly, the impact on people, the real and human impact on people: the people of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Ontario, Quebec and eastern Canada, western Canada, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and the entire United States of America. North America is what matters, Madam Speaker. We partner with our federal government, we partner with our American friends, allies and neighbours to make this a reality.

I also want to recognize some other colleagues: the member from Barrie–Innisfil for all of the work that she has done to ensure that this debate has been rolling today. I want to thank the member from King–Vaughan, the Minister of Education, who, again, really talked to us about the east to west, as the member from Northumberland–Peterborough South just did.

I want to make sure that we talk about a few things as well, Madam Speaker. The Minister of Government and Consumer Services and the MPP for Huron–Bruce, my neighbour, talked a lot about agriculture and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the challenge that this is going to create for our food supply here in Ontario and across our great country if that were to happen. She used the saying, "Therein lies the rub."

What I want to talk a little bit about is that contrast between particularly those that spoke in this House today, the NDP and the Green members, who do not necessarily support jobs and families, and the PC members, who do support jobs and families.

I'm going to start with the MPP for Guelph, the leader of the Green Party, who, in his words, mentioned that we need a wake-up call and to take action. Madam Speaker, if he thinks that in May 2021 it's appropriate to take action and shut down 28,000 jobs in our economy, then that very much worries me. He wants to talk about platitudes and what-ifs and wherefores and what may happen, but this is only a few short months away. At the end of the day, I'm going to ask him if he would pick a lane. Does he support the closure in May 2021 or no? Does he support the jobs of Ontarians today and in May 2021 and for the future, or no? It worries me that the leader of a party—if he thinks

he could agree to such a very short, narrow-sighted and catastrophic decision that short away—would do that to Ontarians without any thought of the magnitude of his decision-making—very, very concerning.

I want to talk about the leader of the official opposition, the member from Hamilton Centre. I quote: "There's no role ... for the provincial government" on line 5. Madam Speaker, I would like to ask that leader and the people that follow her—there's no role to protect Ontario people and families? There's no role to protect jobs for Ontario people and families? There's no role to protect Ontario businesses? There's no role to ensure the reliable supply of energy for Ontario people? There's no role to ensure energy security for the people of Ontario? There's no role to ensure hospitals, long-term-care facilities, retirement homes and all of the other essential health care facilities that benefit Ontarians are not going to be impacted? There's no role there? There's no role about the cost of fuel, food, heating and cooling for all the great families across this great province?

She said that we should be talking about other things, like paid sick days. Madam Speaker, I'm not certain how you claim paid sick days if you don't have a job. She said we should be talking about the kinds of things that are priorities. Well, I would think that jobs, paying your mortgage, feeding your family are pretty fundamental priorities that I'm proud to stand here and fight for with all of my colleagues every single day of the week.

The leader of the official opposition said that there is really no role for provincial governments here, that this is a federal matter. Madam Speaker, I would like to proudly say that our Premier has ensured that there have been billions of dollars for COVID relief and support come from the federal government because of his leadership and advocacy. He has made sure that closing access to the country and provinces so that more infection doesn't come into our province—has been a result of him being there, working in partnership with our federal colleagues. He's made sure, and he's pushed to make sure, that that vaccine supply, which has been derailed and delayed, is actually moving forward here in Ontario.

I want to suggest to the member and the official leader of the opposition that there can be great collaboration with our federal partners and that we can do lots of great things, and maybe she could learn to have a little less partisanship in a time like this so that we could actually move forward.

We, as Ontario, are the economic engine of Confederation, and we always will be. We are proud Canadians as an entire nation. So I would challenge her that there absolutely is benefit and need for the province of Ontario to be at the table with our federal partners and colleagues on an issue that's going to impact our whole province, our whole country and, in fact, all of North America.

She said it's "not appropriate" for the people of Ontario. Well, appropriate in my world and on this side of the chamber is heating homes, powering agriculture and business, fuel for travelling to work, shipping goods and services, medical appointments, powering our hospitals, long-term-care facilities, our seniors' and our low-income needs. Madam Speaker, those are the priorities of

Ontarians. They're the priorities of every single Ontarian, and there's no room for partisanship in this debate.

Our government unequivocally supports the continued safe and responsible operation of Enbridge line 5. To us, line 5 ensures safe transportation of oil, propane and other energy products and access to affordable energy and economic benefits for communities across the country. This is why we are actively engaged in efforts to keep the line 5 pipeline operating.

There is no doubt that line 5 is a vital piece of North American energy infrastructure. It's a lifeline to all people, not only for our province but also for our neighbours in Quebec, the entire Great Lakes region, including Michigan, and for our country as a whole. As a light crude oil and natural gas liquids pipeline with a capacity of 540,000 barrels per day, line 5 is truly vital to our refining and petrochemical sectors.

Our four refineries ensure that Ontario, Quebec, Michigan and the entire Great Lakes region are well supplied with essential products like home-heating fuels, gasoline, diesel and jet fuel. The impact to our friends in western Canada can't be understated if this is to go through.

I want to share with you, Madam Speaker, that again there will be negative impacts on the fuel needs of the agricultural sector, construction, manufacturing, hospitals, long-term care and retirement homes—every single aspect of your life that you can think of will in some way be impacted if this short-sighted decision goes forward.

We are actively engaged. The Premier has stepped up. He's written to the Michigan state governor and the Prime Minister to voice his support for the ongoing operation. He's reached out to the governor's office, because there's nothing more important to the Premier and our party than ensuring the economic recovery of our province, and this can only be achieved if we have continued access to a stable, secure energy supply.

My colleague Minister Greg Rickford, Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, put out an early statement pointing out that the pipeline is by far the safest way to transport our fuels. He's concerned that a shutdown would inevitably lead to fuel shortages, increasing energy costs and creating massive job losses across the province.

MPP Bailey and myself and some of our other colleagues had a joint meeting with the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Rocco Rossi and team, and I want to applaud them for what they were doing. Those members from across in the United States who are elected representatives held the exact same concerns for their people as we are here. This is far-reaching for both of our countries. We want to ensure that we actually support those concerned workers and stakeholders.

The Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce, again—40 people attended a meeting and I'm going to quote just a couple.

Crispin Colvin of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture said, "The line 5 pipeline is critical, not only for the agriculture industry, but for employment, cost of living,

the economy, and ensuring the continued production of thousands of Canadian products that we rely on daily. It's a vital piece of energy infrastructure, whose importance extends beyond the borders of our country and into Michigan."

Jason McMichael, president of the district labour council, representing about 17,000 unionized workers in Sarnia, said, "This issue has brought together and formed alliances that you wouldn't typically see" at "all levels of government.... You've seen the business and labour community come together ... and not to take away from the energy side of things, but to make sure we also recognize the other side of things, which is the workers.... There's thousands more of our building trades workers" and "trickle-down jobs."

We had lots of others: Dan Kelly from the Canadian Propane Association; Don Fusco from the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada; Scott Archer from pipefitters' Local 663; Marc Gagnon from the Canadian Fuels Association.

Madam Speaker, my friend and colleague Bob Bailey, the MPP for Sarnia, has done yeoman's work on this. He has stood every day on this matter and made sure that people know about it. I want to assure you, Madam Speaker, and the people of Ontario: We are here in solidarity with you. We are here to ensure that we will protect your jobs, your livelihoods and, most importantly, the health of your family, your loved ones, your neighbours, and those in the United States as well. We will be with you the whole way.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): I recognize the member from Barrie–Innisfil on a point of order.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. If you seek it, you will find we have unanimous consent to see the clock at 6.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Just a moment, please.

Further debate? Further debate? Okay. There being no further debate, I declare the debate concluded.

The member from Barrie–Innisfil is seeking unanimous consent to see the clock at 6. Do we agree? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

STAY HOME IF YOU ARE SICK
ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 PERMETTANT
AUX EMPLOYÉS MALADES
DE RESTER CHEZ EUX

Ms. Sattler moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 239, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 with respect to paid leave / Projet de loi 239, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne les congés payés.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French: Pursuant to standing order 101, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise on behalf of the people I represent in London West, and as labour critic for the Ontario NDP caucus, to lead off the second reading debate on my bill, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act.

I want to begin with a reality check for this government on what it's like to be among the 60% of Ontario workers who don't have access to paid sick days, or the 75% of racialized or immigrant workers in this province who are docked pay if they are too sick to go into work; what it's like to not be able to work from home, to wake up every morning for the past 11 months worried about rising COVID case counts and inadequate PPE while you are getting ready for your job; to be low wage, never sure if you'll be able to make ends meet at the end of the month; to work on the shop floor of a factory or a warehouse or a food processing plant, shoulder to shoulder with hundreds of other workers; to be in a grocery store bagging groceries for hundreds of customers every day; to be in a long-term-care home or in the community providing care for vulnerable seniors.

Speaker, if any of these workers or their children develop COVID symptoms, they have two options: They can take an unpaid leave of absence, knowing their pay will be cut, then apply for and hopefully qualify for the federal sickness benefit, or they can go into work sick or send their child to school sick, which is exactly what they are doing because they don't have a choice. They can't afford even one lost day of pay. It could mean not being able to pay the rent or not being able to buy groceries.

Last month, Peel Public Health released a study of 8,000 workers in the Peel region, a study that should have been an urgent wake-up call for this government. Between August and January, 2,000 of those workers said they reported to work with COVID symptoms, including 80 who had a positive COVID result. That's one in four workers.

Was it because these workers didn't know they could take unpaid leave and apply for the federal program? Was it because they opposed public health advice to stay home? Was it because they wanted to expose their co-workers to COVID-19? No. It was because they were thinking about their paycheque at the end of the week if they missed a day to get a COVID test, and another day or two to wait for the result. They were thinking about being evicted for being short on rent, about having their utilities cut off, about not being able to put food on the table.

Unfortunately, Speaker, this government has failed to recognize that an unpaid leave of absence is meaningless for a worker who lives paycheque to paycheque. A federal temporary sickness benefit that is temporary, that does not apply to all workers, that requires a worker to have lost 50% of their salary to qualify, that's only available on a

one-week basis, that pays less than minimum wage is not going to help the worker who needs a couple of days to get tested or vaccinated, whether the program is two weeks or four weeks. It's not going to help the nurse who is asked to self-isolate for two weeks and gets a sickness benefit that pays less than half of his or her regular salary.

My bill proposes a made-in-Ontario program of paid sick days delivered by employers that will enable workers to stay home if they are sick, without interruption or reduction of their pay, and it will reimburse employers for paid sick days during the pandemic. Why is this important, Speaker? It's because we won't get our province through this pandemic if we can't control workplace spread, especially with new highly contagious variants circulating throughout our communities.

It's going to be months and months before there are enough Ontarians vaccinated to achieve herd immunity. As the economy re-opens without any new measures in place, workplaces will continue to fuel transmission. We saw this during the second wave in December, when workplaces surged to become the most common site of COVID-19 outbreaks, surpassing even long-term-care homes.

Everyone but this Premier seems to understand how dangerous it is to all of us when workers are forced to give up their pay in order to stay home. When going to work is the only option, it puts all of us at risk. It can spread infection to co-workers and customers, who take the virus home to their families. It can force the closure of small businesses, which are already hanging by a thread and are unlikely to survive another provincial lockdown.

The Premier has said that he doesn't support paid sick days; that investing in Ontario workers is a waste of money; that provincial paid sick days would duplicate the federal program; that workers will double-dip if Ontario moves forward with my bill. He seems unaware that workers who are receiving paid sick days from their employer are not eligible for CRSB, so there is no way to double-dip, and that the federal minister has stated clearly that a provincial program of paid sick days does not duplicate the federal program.

But where New Democrats most fundamentally disagree with the Premier is on the urgency of implementing a provincial program of paid sick days, and it's not just the NDP who feels this. Former Conservative Party leaders Patrick Brown, now mayor of Brampton, and John Tory, mayor of Toronto, are calling on the province to introduce paid sick days. So are Ontario's Big City Mayors, representing Ontario's 29 biggest cities and almost 70% of Ontarians. So is the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, which represents all 34 Ontario boards of health and medical officers of health. They sent a letter to the Premier urging the permanent inclusion of paid sick leave provisions under the Employment Standards Act as a public health measure to prevent transmission of communicable diseases, including COVID-19.

The Ontario Federation of Labour, which is the voice of over one million Ontario workers, announced their support for paid sick days. The Better Way Alliance, a

coalition of small business owners across the province, is supporting paid sick days, saying, “Paid sick days are not only a public health imperative, they make good business sense. The cost of providing paid sick leave is minimal compared to the cost of outbreaks or the cycles of lockdowns and restrictions, which will continue as long as workers without paid sick days have no choice but to go into work sick.”

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce issued a statement when I introduced my bill in December, saying, “Public health and safety are priorities for us all. Ensuring people, particularly during a pandemic, can afford to stay home, is both the right thing to do and an economical thing to do. When a worker protects themselves, they protect their colleagues and employer and in turn, they safeguard the entire business.”

Speaker, I want to recognize the health care workers and the community members who are part of the Decent Work and Health Network for the comprehensive research report they released in August, which provided the evidence for my bill. Clearly, the only way to address the shortcomings of the federal CRSB and allow workers to follow public health advice in this pandemic, without risking their pay, is through employer-delivered paid sick days.

We also need, at the same time, to protect workers after the pandemic is over. My bill will make sure that paid sick days are permanent, available immediately when the next pandemic hits and when we finally make it through this one. Most importantly, my bill directs the government to create a two-part financial support program to assist employers to provide both pandemic and regular paid sick days. We believe that government has a role to play in funding pandemic sick days, because there is a clear and compelling public benefit when workers with COVID symptoms can stay home from work.

1640

In addition, we are calling on the government to provide transitional funding for struggling small businesses and non-profits to provide regular paid sick days.

Instead of ignoring the near-unanimous calls for paid sick days, this government should have been consulting with small businesses and non-profits on how to reimburse employers quickly to minimize the impact on cash flow, which is what I've been doing over the past two months since my bill was introduced.

Speaker, paid sick days during and after a pandemic are both good public health policy and good economic policy. There is overwhelming evidence to show that paid sick days significantly reduce the spread of infectious disease. They also enhance preventive health care and reduce overall health care system costs.

In a Globe and Mail opinion piece entitled “Politicians Must Realize Paid Sick Leave Isn't about Entitlements, It's Smart Economic Policy,” the senior business editor said, “Mr. Ford should adopt Ms. Sattler's ideas. His inaction on paid sick leave is a dereliction of duty. Labour laws are a provincial responsibility.” Speaker, that's why 18 boards of health across the province have passed their

own motions calling for legislated permanent paid sick days or to officially support my bill.

I'm going to read some of the names of those health boards, because the names are going to be very familiar to members across the way: Peel Public Health; the Chatham-Kent Board of Health; the Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington Public Health; the Huron Perth board of health; Durham region; the Hastings Prince Edward Board of Health; the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit; Peterborough Public Health; the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pineridge District board of health. Those are just some of the boards of health that have recognized the importance of my bill. I want members across the way to reflect that many of the people who serve on these boards of health are actually appointees of this government. They represent their community. They represent business leaders in the community, community leaders, municipal councillors and others.

Speaker, this government likes to claim that we are all in this together, but we are not. We may be experiencing the same storm, but some are in yachts while others are in the water alone, clinging to life jackets. Passing my bill will allow the Premier to show that he is actually listening to public health officials—something he says all the time. It will show that he is truly committed to protecting workers and supporting struggling small businesses; that he recognizes the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on racialized, immigrant and low-wage workers; that he cares about health equity and racial and economic justice.

Paid sick days save lives. No Ontario worker should have to make the impossible choice between providing for their family and protecting their co-workers, customers and community. I call on the government to work with us, to work with the official opposition, and pass my bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Jane McKenna: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 239, the Stay Home If You're Sick Act, 2020.

In my riding of Burlington, people recognize the importance of protecting workers and keeping them safe during the pandemic. They also understand that creating new, permanent programs that significantly increase costs for struggling businesses or taxpayers does not make sense in the middle of a global pandemic. Sadly, the leader of the NDP would rather saddle small businesses with extra costs than encourage workers to access the federal government's paid sick day program.

Speaker, before the pandemic, every Ontario worker was entitled to eight days of unpaid leave, three sick days, three family responsibility days and two bereavement days. When the pandemic hit, we recognized the potential impact of COVID-19 on workers and their families. That's why the first legislation we passed at the start of the pandemic created a job-protected leave. This leave ensured no worker would lose their job if they stayed home to self-isolate or to care for a loved one. We were one of the first jurisdictions in Canada to pass such progressive legislation.

We also recognized that in Canada, paid sick days have historically been the responsibility of the employer and/or union collective agreements. But the impact of COVID-19 has been brutal and far-reaching. That's why on July 16, 2020, Premier Ford joined our federal and provincial partners in signing a historic \$19-billion Safe Restart Agreement, which included \$1.1 billion to provide Ontario workers with 10 paid sick days.

Just last week, the federal government announced they would double the number of paid sick days from 10 to 20. This is great news. By working with the federal government to improve a program that already exists, we are better supporting Ontario workers and their families. Even Canada's unions have welcomed the extension of this program. Yet when my staff and I looked at the websites of several NDP members, we couldn't find application details on the federal paid sick day program. That is really a shame, because as elected officials we have an obligation to inform our constituents about the government programs available to support them.

Speaker, I want to make sure the people who live in the NDP-held ridings know how to access the federal government's 20 paid sick days. For details on the CRSB, call 1-800-959-2019, or visit my website at JaneMcKennaMPP.ca/CRSB.

As usual, this NDP bill makes promises and proposes flashy solutions without considering the cost to taxpayers. Section 7 forces all employers to give seven paid days of leave to anyone working for them for just one week. While I like a good "buy one, get one" sale, it's ridiculous to think that under the member for London West's bill, if you work seven days, you'll get seven paid days off. No sick leave program in North America gives employees paid leave after just one week on the job. Policy ideas like this one prove that the NDP's jobs and economic growth policies have only gotten worse since they were thrown out.

We've all heard the saying, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." This certainly isn't the case with the NDP, whose policy flip-flops are as hard to track as the Electoral College in the United States.

Many of us in this place remember the first and only NDP government in Ontario, a government that forced public employees, including our front-line health care heroes, to take 10 unpaid days off every year for three years. Why did they do that? The NDP government said they had to, to get control over their \$17-billion deficit. In today's dollars, that's about \$27.5 billion.

Speaker, our government knows, just like the NDP did way back then, that creating new permanent programs that grow our structural deficit will only result in impossible choices down the road. But today's NDP has a short memory. They supported federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh's push for 10 paid sick days federally. In fact, the NDP labour critic posted on her Facebook, after the passage of the 10 paid federal sick days, that "[I'm] so proud of the efforts of Jagmeet Singh." Yet, just last week, the NDP member for Ottawa Centre called the 10 paid sick days provided by the federal government "useless."

Speaker, I'm sure the 110,000 Ontario families who have been helped by this program don't think it's useless.

I'd also like to mention sections 13 and 14 of this bill. Section 13 states that "an employer may require an employee who takes leave under this section to provide evidence reasonable in the circumstances that the employee is entitled to the leave." No problem there, but in section 14, employers are prohibited from asking their employees for a sick note as proof that they qualify for personal emergency leave.

So let's put a few pieces together. Someone who works for just seven days now qualifies for seven paid days off. Now the employer, who barely knows this person after seven days on the job, is prohibited from asking for a sick note. Speaker, as much as I like Michael J. Fox in *Back to the Future*, we've seen the result of NDP policies like this before. We don't need another 1980s or 1990s reboot.

From the start of this pandemic, our government's message has been clear: If you're sick, stay home. Yet, the Ontario NDP want Ontario to believe something different. They want people to believe every other province is duplicating the federal paid sick day program. This is not the case. The NDP want people to believe every other province is using the pandemic to make permanent changes to their sick leave policies. This is not the case, no matter how loud they say it.

1650

I'd like to share the latest information I've received from the legislative library this week on sick days.

Let's start with British Columbia's NDP government. On Tuesday, the member from Brampton East said the following about their NDP cousins in BC: "That's what happens when you elect an NDP government. They actually put in policy that helps folks out..." When it comes to sick days, before COVID-19, the government of BC provided workers with three unpaid sickness or injury days. During the pandemic, workers in BC have access to unpaid leave.

Before the pandemic hit Alberta, workers there received five unpaid personal or family days. During COVID-19, workers get 14 unpaid days.

Under Saskatchewan's employment act, workers get 12 unpaid personal days. When the pandemic hit, the Saskatchewan government offered a Self-Isolation Support Program, providing \$450 per week for a maximum of two weeks. The program ended five days after the federal government's paid sick days came into place.

Before COVID-19, Manitoba law mandated three unpaid days for workers employed for at least 30 days by the same employer. During the pandemic, workers are eligible for an unpaid Public Health Emergency Leave.

In Nunavut, outside of COVID-19, it is unclear what, if any, sick leave policies exist. During COVID-19, government employees only can apply to receive up to 14 paid self-isolation days.

Before COVID-19, the Northwest Territories provided workers with five unpaid days each year.

In the Yukon, outside of the pandemic, workers receive a maximum of 12 days without pay. During COVID-19,

workers are eligible for 14 unpaid sick days. Employers who choose to pay workers for sick days can apply to a paid sick leave rebate program to receive a rebate for up to 10 days. This program was funded to a maximum of \$4 million and ends next month.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, before the pandemic, workers employed for three months were eligible for three unpaid sick days. During COVID-19, workers can access a communicable disease emergency leave.

In New Brunswick, workers are normally entitled to five unpaid days. During the pandemic, workers can access an unpaid COVID-19 emergency leave.

Before COVID-19, workers in Nova Scotia received three unpaid sick days. During the pandemic, workers can access an unpaid emergency leave.

Finally, Quebec: With a population of just 8.5 million, Quebec has recorded over 10,000 deaths, nearly 50% of the Canadian total. Prior to the pandemic, workers in Quebec received up to 26 weeks of unpaid leave and two paid sick days after three months on the job. During the pandemic, Quebec has not introduced any paid sick days.

I want to underline that while other provinces I mentioned have limited job-protected leave, Ontario's infectious disease emergency leave is unlimited.

Let's consider federally regulated industries, the public and private sector employers that fall under federal labour laws—companies like WestJet or Canada Post. Prior to the pandemic, workers in federally regulated industries were entitled to three paid sick days after three months on the job. During COVID-19, these workers can receive up to two weeks of unpaid leave.

It has been all over the news that Canada Post's Mississauga Gateway facility had one of Ontario's largest COVID-19 workplace outbreaks. The massive outbreak happened despite workers at Canada Post having three paid sick days.

This seems like the right moment to quote the leader of the official opposition, who, on October 5, 2020, told CityNews: "Had people been supported by their government not to go to work if they're sick ... and to get supports financially to enable them to take time off work, we wouldn't be in the situation that we are."

The outbreak at Canada Post shows that paid sick days aren't the magic bullet to stop the spread of COVID-19.

The Ontario NDP are proposing a paid sick day program that doesn't exist in North America—a program neither businesses nor government can afford. The NDP want a government-funded program that would offer benefits well in excess of any other social support program in Ontario.

Speaker, I understand that the NDP never take into account the costs of the programs they suggest. They never consider the logistics, and they always forget that at the end of the day, the taxpayer is the one on the hook.

We will not be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Doly Begum: Madam Speaker, those who are risking their lives on the front lines every day need to be able to stay home if they're sick, which is why my

colleagues and I have repeatedly called for paid sick days. Doctors from Scarborough have shared harrowing accounts of people who, upon finding out that they had COVID, their first response was worrying about not being able to make ends meet and having to lose shifts at work.

Why is this government so committed to making workers choose between their health and their livelihoods? Time and time again—we just heard: Members from the government side have claimed that they do, in fact, provide paid sick days and that this bill is a waste of money, taxpayer dollars. Let me highlight the facts for the members opposite.

First, the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, or the CRSB, is an emergency federal program that many workers do not qualify for. It keeps out the very workers who need access to permanent paid sick days. Once again, this is a federal emergency program that is not a replacement for paid sick days.

Furthermore, Bill 239 calls for paid sick days that are paid for by employers, not the government. Calling it double-dipping or a waste is not only wrong, but also an attempt to undermine the efforts of essential workers across the province and the public outcry for paid sick days.

The truth is that workers need paid sick days when there is no pandemic. It's the right thing to do for workers and for our economy. Nobody should have to go to work sick and risk their lives or their families. This is why I am voting for Bill 239, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, and calling on all members of all parties in this House to vote for this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Coteau: It's a real pleasure to speak on this bill, Bill 239. I'd like to thank the member from London West for everything she's done to bring forward this important issue here in—did I mistake the riding? No, I got it right? Okay. But I just want to thank the member for bringing this forward because I think it speaks to the decency we have here in Ontario and the type of society we've built in this province.

I know that the Conservatives see this as protecting taxpayer dollars and over-expenditure and not needed and a duplication. We've heard it in this Legislature. But I really do think that this bill speaks to the decency of Ontarians and the fact that if someone in Ontario becomes ill for two days and can actually use the sick days—it still allows them to pay bills, it allows them to make sure that their family is protected and they don't have to apply to a program and wait for weeks to get some type of payment back. So I think this is a good thing for Ontarians.

The Conservatives, when they came into power, one of the first things they did was to cut the two sick days that existed in Ontario. The fact that we had just two days and the fact that the government cut those two days I think speaks to the type of government, the type of approach they've had over the last two and a half years. We saw a lot of cuts—and it's part of a bigger trend, I think, with this government—cuts that actually take away from people. In return, they give a lot of these incentives back

to their business friends and big corporations out there. But the opposition—and I can speak, obviously, only for the Ontario Liberal Party—we believe in looking for ways to support families and to support people. Unlike the Conservatives—again, I spoke to a larger trend that’s taking place with this government, cuts to culture funds like the Ontario Arts Council, cuts to nutrition programs and education and library services. We saw cuts to after-school programs in the poorest neighbourhoods in Toronto and other communities across the province, cuts to communities and schools. These were things that were there to build people up and to support families, and unfortunately, we have not seen this from this government. Even such a simple thing during a pandemic—and I think it’s a very simple thing to put in place. And do you know what? Even if they disagree with it over the long haul, maybe a short-term measure to put in place some sick days to enhance the federal program that exists and look for ways to support workers. But this government definitely does not want to do this.

1700

If you go into their local communities—and the member from London West was just talking about many of the communities that they represent—there are organizations, there are chambers of commerce, there are medical officers—all these different groups within their own communities are saying that you need to step up and actually make some investment into sick days in Ontario. When you have a government that has around 40% of the budget of the federal government and only putting in 5% of the COVID response that goes back to people and business, that’s not a balance. This government has only provided 5% of the actual COVID response that has supported businesses and people here in Ontario, and to me, that’s a shame because there is a lot of revenue on that side and the government overall has the ability to make these types of investments, especially when they’re sitting on billions of dollars of surplus money that was specifically aimed to respond to COVID.

I think that we need to make sure that the people of Ontario understand that this government is dis-aligned with where people want to go in this province, what people are saying—experts and people within the business sector. When the Conservatives have the chambers of commerce in many different jurisdictions standing up and saying that your response has been terrible, that speaks volumes. When you have the independent business federation stepping up and saying that this government has not done a good job in its response to the pandemic, that is a huge problem for this government. It’s dis-alignment of Ontario values, and it’s not something they’ll be able to shake off very easily, because when we come out of this pandemic, the truth will be revealed, and I think Ontario voters will make a decision and that will be the right decision.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I’m absolutely honoured today to rise and speak in support of the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act on behalf of my constituents in Davenport. I want to thank the member for London West for her leadership.

Every Ontario public health unit, the medical officers of health, mayors and city councillors and small businesses have all called on the government to support our call for paid sick days.

Madam Speaker, in the GTA, 65% of workers are doing work that is considered essential, and 90% of those workers are low-wage, mostly immigrant workers who don’t have access to paid sick days. Paid sick days are an essential element in the strategy we need to avoid more spread of COVID-19, more closed businesses, more closed schools, more deaths and, yes, a third wave.

We have asked this government repeatedly to expedite this bill, to make it law. I urge them to stop playing politics with this issue. Show the courage to do the right thing. Work with us to save lives and support working people. Support this bill, and let’s ensure every worker in Ontario can afford to stay home if they’re sick.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Yarde: I rise to voice my support for Bill 239, Stay Home If You Are Sick Act. Brampton has been one of the most heavily impacted regions of the pandemic. One of the biggest reasons for this has been workplace outbreaks and a failure on the part of this government to keep workers safe.

Brampton has seen a total of 100 workplace outbreaks since March 2020. According to Dr. Lawrence Loh, Peel’s medical officer of health, up to a quarter of Peel residents diagnosed with COVID-19 went to work while sick. That is 25% of our essential workers going to work while they’re sick because they can’t take a day off. This is a horrifying statistic that is caused by this government’s inaction in mandating paid sick days.

I hope this government realizes that my constituents of Brampton North and the rest of Ontario need this government to mandate paid sick days in order to prevent further workplace outbreaks and to keep people safe. The government has a role to play to help workers, and they need to step up to the plate to help workers. Just like they are doing in British Columbia and the Yukon, they need to do this and they need to do this now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Sara Singh: I’m honoured to rise here today and contribute to the debate as a member from Brampton. We have heard time and time again that the essential workers in our manufacturing and warehouse and logistics hubs throughout the Peel region do not have access to the paid sick days that they need. What you heard from the government today was that they think paid sick days are a waste of money, but actually, your inaction is costing lives in the province of Ontario. It’s not a waste of money to be investing in workers; it’s actually the right thing to be doing.

It’s unfortunate this government just simply doesn’t understand that these public health measures are not only going to help save lives, but they’re actually going to have a positive economic impact in our communities. We heard from Dr. Loh, who has echoed the call of big city mayors

and our mayor, Patrick Brown, for paid sick days. What do you not understand? Paid sick days will save lives. Do the right thing. Legislate paid sick days here in the province of Ontario.

The federal minister has been clear that not only do provinces need to step up, but she was clear that the federal program is only a stop-gap measure. So I'm going to urge this government to support our colleague from London West's bill, the Stay Home If You Are Sick Act, and help us make sure that people in this province don't have to choose between their paycheque and health, and that they can stay home if they are sick.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'm happy to rise today to support my colleague from London West's bill, Bill 239. I want to bring the voice of the working poor to this House, because the working poor have the same bills that we have. They have rent bills, food bills, child care costs. They cannot afford to not get a paycheque immediately. They live paycheque to paycheque. They struggle. When I was canvassing, they said to me, "I had to choose between getting my children's teeth fixed and buying groceries." That's the working poor in Ontario, and that's what this bill is for. Those are the people who are working at Walmart, who are working at McDonald's, who are working in small places, as in manufacturing.

What I really want people to consider is that paid sick leave will ensure that those people have dignity and can stay at home and make sure our province stays safe.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Glover: When will this government get the message that we need paid sick days to get through this pandemic? Recent research shows that workplaces are the most common source of outbreaks. We are all tired of living in lockdown, but these lockdowns are extended because this government refuses to take the measures to more rapidly contain transmission of COVID-19 and get us out of the lockdown.

At the top of the list of measures this government should be taking are paid sick days. The federal recovery and sickness benefit is completely inadequate, as was discovered by Bazz Newton, a constituent in my riding, who found that the CRSB is not the same as paid sick days.

I ask the government to support the NDP bill for paid sick days in Ontario. You will be joining a loud chorus of support from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario, the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario, the Ontario Nurses' Association, Toronto Mayor John Tory and all 34 boards of health and medical officers of health.

Help us get through this pandemic. Vote for my colleague's bill to bring in paid sick days in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I've stood in this House numerous times to speak to the need for paid sick days. I've shared with members the economic arguments and the

public health arguments. Today, I want to share the moral argument.

Every day for a year now, essential workers across Ontario have been at the front lines of this pandemic. Whether they ring us through the checkout or deliver food right to our front door, their work allows us to feed our families. Whether they are child care workers or PSWs, essential workers look after our children, parents and grandparents.

But have we forgotten that essential workers have families too? Have we forgotten that they have the same needs as everyone else? Bills need to be paid too so that they can put food on the table and they can take care of their families. But what happens when an essential worker starts to feel sick and they know that they can't take a paid sick day? Many workers live paycheque to paycheque, where taking an unpaid sick day is not an option. Imagine the fear they must feel when they start to feel that sore throat or cough. Imagine the stress of going to work sick, simply to feed your child and keep a roof over their head, hoping that they can make it through the day.

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We all know this is wrong, and we have an obligation here. Essential workers are heroes, but even they get sick. They're out there for us, putting themselves at risk of infection so that we can have our groceries, so that our families can have care, but we aren't providing the very basic things that they need in this vital work, and that's leading them to getting sick.

Let's express our thanks to essential workers, but let's do more than just clap for them. Let's legislate paid sick days for all.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): Further debate?

I return to the member from London West who has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank my colleagues for their support for Bill 239 and for the efforts that have been made to bring this bill forward in this Legislature. Certainly this was not something that I did on my own, and it has really galvanized an incredible coalition of support. The government can reject my bill, they can say that they're not interested in protecting workers and supporting small businesses, but they can't close their ears to all of the organizations, the people in this province who are calling for some kind of paid sick days for Ontario workers. If we're going to be make it through this pandemic, prevent a third wave, we need to make sure that workers can stay home when they are sick.

The member for Burlington talked about all of the other jurisdictions and what they're doing. She didn't talk about San Francisco, about New York City, about Colorado—all of the other jurisdictions that have paid sick days and have shown that it's not going to be a burden on employers and that it improves employee retention and brings all kinds of other benefits.

I'm not surprised that the member for Burlington heard some concerns from small businesses, because when I consulted with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the

Ontario business improvement association and the Ontario Nonprofit Network, I heard lots of things about how this government has failed to recognize the real problems that struggling small businesses are facing in the province. There was some skepticism—I'm going to admit that—about whether this government could actually deliver on a program such as what I'm proposing in my bill, but I don't want that to be a barrier. I want us to be bold, I want us to be ambitious, and I want us to be responsive to the actual needs of the people that we represent in this province.

Speaker, I call on this government—every day, they talk about how they're listening to public health advice. I want them to actually listen to public health advice, to listen to Dr. Loh, Dr. de Villa, all of the medical officers of health who are saying that what we need in Ontario is a made-in-this-province approach to paid sick days. Show the people of this province that you're listening. Show that you respect the expertise and the advice that is brought to you by public health officials, and move forward with paid sick days. You don't have to pass my Stay At Home If You Are Sick Act, but do something to ensure that no worker has to make that impossible choice between staying at

home if they are sick or going into work and possibly infecting their co-workers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

Ms. Sattler has moved second reading of Bill 239, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, with respect to paid leave.

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 nays have it.

Pursuant to standing order 101(d), the recorded division on this item of private members' public business will be deferred to the proceeding of deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Jennifer K. French): All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, this House stands adjourned until Monday, March 1, 2021, at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1715.

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Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
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Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud— Weston	
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
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Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough- Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
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Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
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