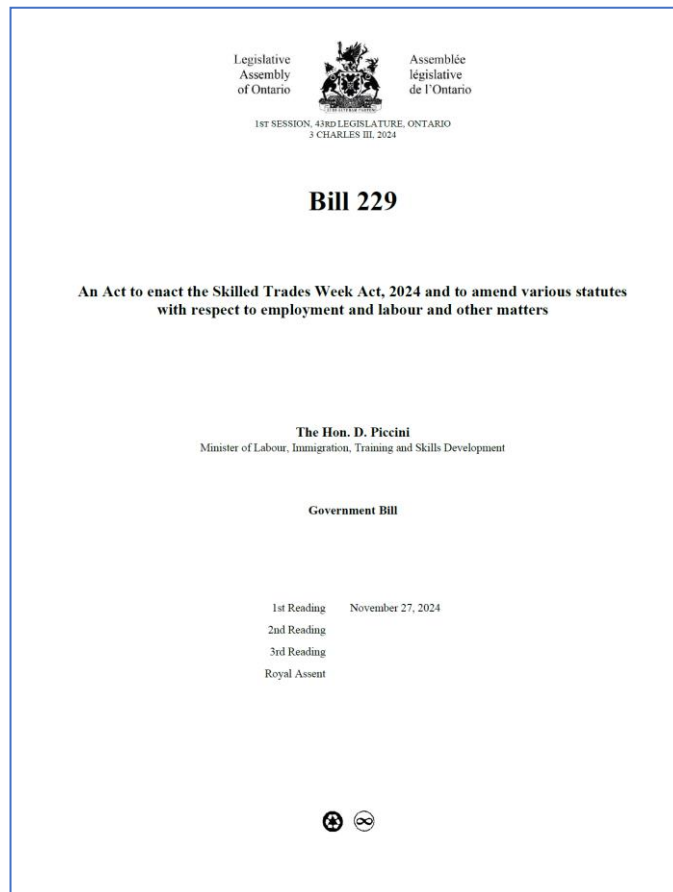


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**Bill 229 Hansard Excerpts: Re Bill 229,  
Working for Workers Six Act, 2024**

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**Prepared by L.A. Liversidge  
December 13, 2024**

## Bill 229 Hansard

***Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters***

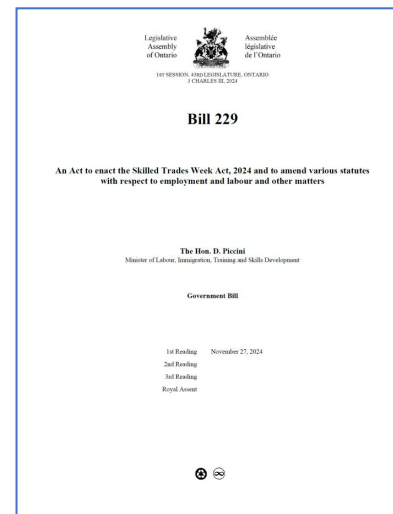
### Hansard of Legislative Debates as at December 12, 2024 8:00 am

#### Bill 229, Working for Workers Six Act, 2024

Piccini, Hon. David Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development

Current status: Second Reading Ordered for Third Reading pursuant to the Order of the House

Date	Bill stage	Event	Outcome
December 11, 2024	Second Reading	Ordered for Third Reading pursuant to the Order of the House	-
December 11, 2024	Second Reading	Vote	Carried on division
December 10, 2024	Second Reading	Question put	Vote deferred
December 10, 2024	Second Reading	Time allocated	-
December 4, 2024	Second Reading	Debated	-
November 28, 2024	Second Reading	Debated	Debate adjourned
November 27, 2024	First Reading	Ordered for Second Reading	-
November 27, 2024	First Reading	Vote	Carried



#### November 27, 2024: Working for Workers Six Act, 2024

Mr. Piccini moved first reading of the following bill:

**Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters**

**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'll invite the minister to briefly explain his bill if he wishes to do so.

**Hon. David Piccini:** I would. Thank you, Speaker.

Our government is introducing the **Working for Workers Six Act, 2024**. Again, I want to draw attention to everybody sitting up in the gallery who have had a pen and a profound voice in the legislation that I bring before the House today. It is through them that we're doing this, and I'm very grateful for all of them and the impact that they've had on this legislation.

Its package of regulatory changes and other actions would, if passed, help protect the safety and well-being of workers and their families, keep costs down for workers and businesses, honour workers and grow Ontario's workforce.

Our proposed changes would expand on the groundbreaking actions across five previous Working for Workers Acts since 2021 and build a brighter future for all Ontarians to ensure our province remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Again, I'd like to thank them all, Speaker. Thank you.

**November 28, 2024**

**Working for Workers Six Act, 2024**

Mr. Piccini moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** The Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development has moved second reading of Bill 229. You may now lead off debate.

1320

**Hon. David Piccini:** It's always an honour to rise in this place to serve the good people of Northumberland–Peterborough South. It's an honour representing them, and I want to thank them for giving me this privilege.

It's an honour to rise to debate **Bill 229, the Working for Workers Six Act, 2024**. Madam Speaker, I'll be dividing my time in half with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Ajax. I want to acknowledge her support, her friendship, her advice and the hard work she's doing at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. She's been an incredible advocate for workers across the province, and I value her.

Speaker, I also want to give a special shout-out to the team watching, who've been working around the clock, many a late night, on this bill: Chief Mathew Clancy, the policy team, under Kyle Fritz's leadership; our comms team, under Zoë Knowles's leadership; our ops team, under Juliana Wilson's leadership; and our stakeholder team, under Josh Manangan's leadership. That is the team, and everybody in that office have worked around the clock. They were here yesterday, and I just want to thank them for all that they do. I'm incredibly proud of them and blessed to be working with them.

I also want to extend a thank you to the team at the ministry under Deputy Minister Greg Meredith's leadership, the entire team that has worked very hard on this bill. They make a real impact every day on the lives of everyday Ontarians, and I want to thank the team at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, all the public servants there, for the work they do every day, and all of them our agencies as well.

I want to also recognize partners. I said yesterday at bill intro, when we announced this bill, that this is the articulation of so many groups of people: partners like the Ontario Road Builders' Association and the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association. I see we have the wildland firefighters represented here today, and I want to thank them for the work they do, and the Fire Fighters Association of Ontario and Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs. Our union partners—too many to recognize them all, but I thank the team at the provincial building trades, and I thank the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario for the work they do; the Canadian Cancer Society; Newcomer Women's Services; agencies like the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board; and Skilled Trades Ontario.

I also want to acknowledge people and mention their names here in this House:

—Lavanya, who was targeted by a fraudulent immigration consultant who scammed her out of \$10,000. We heard her story in Brampton;

—Zane, Baden and Scottie Colt—we're affectionately calling this bill Scottie's Act—a family through surrogacy who deserve the same job-protected leave as any other family;

—people like Nadia, who shared her story of surviving cancer and the importance of job security, or Natasha, who's had to jerry-rig her PPE to fit properly and who stands as a mentor and an example for young women entering the skilled trades;

—the firefighters who run headfirst into danger to protect our community and who, as a result, are four times more likely to die from cancer; and

—people like Julie, who shared her story yesterday. She spoke to working roadside.

These are everyday heroes who work to build a stronger Ontario, workers who didn't have enough work to do under the previous government because they weren't building the infrastructure this province so desperately needs, but workers who also deserve the respect of a government that takes measures to protect them at their places of work. We heard Julie's story yesterday, and no worker should have to go through what she went through.

I also, finally, want to thank Premier Ford. He has given us the opportunity to bring forward these bills multiple times a year—three now since I've had the privilege of becoming minister. We're moving quickly. He recognizes

that it's a constant, iterative process. There's a reason we've had bipartisan consensus around this, because multiple times a year we're going back and if we missed something or didn't address it, we're tweaking it and we're fixing it in future Working for Workers bills. But that's only because of his leadership, and I want to thank the Premier for that. He knows, and our government knows, that by putting workers first, we can bring the Ontario dream within the reach of more people and ensure this great province we call home remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

I've long said that an economy that doesn't work for workers doesn't work at all. This proposal will be our sixth Working for Workers bill. It builds on the strong success of our five previous Working for Workers bills. This larger Working for Workers Six package contains new proposed legislation, regulatory amendments and other actions that would help people find good jobs, increase worker protections, support newcomers and keep more money in peoples' wallets.

The four main themes of this bill are:

- supporting the health and well-being of workers and their families;
- keeping costs down for workers and businesses—something we all hear at the doors and in the ridings from the constituents we serve;
- honouring workers; and
- growing Ontario's workforce.

By continuing to put workers first, we can create opportunity and good-paying jobs, and we can ensure Ontario remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Speaker, I want to start off our remarks today talking a bit about steps we're taking to support families and workers in the workplace. At the heart of this bill isn't just policy; it's people, families and the dignity that they deserve. Everyone here knows the joy brought to our lives of children—whether you have one, whether you have a friend who has children, family members who have children—and how precious that time with family is. I think nobody knows better than every member of this House the importance of family. Why? Because so many of us come from far distances and are away from them for so long.

No one should have to choose between being a worker or being a parent. That's why we're proposing a new 16-week job-protected leave for adoptive and surrogacy parents under the Employment Standards Act. This new leave would align with upcoming federal employment insurance benefits for adoptive and surrogacy parents. It would allow families to focus on welcoming a child into their care without the added worry of losing their job.

We heard from the Colts. We heard from their story. They've been such strong advocates. To the team at Conceivable Dreams, thank you for your advocacy.

But it's not just prospective and new parents we're supporting in this bill. We're also standing up for the health and well-being of hard-working Ontarians by proposing a new long-term illness leave for employees unable to work due to a serious medical condition. We want to make sure that employees with a serious medical condition have the time away from work they need to get treatment and recover. This new 26-week job-protected unpaid leave would align with the length of the 26-week federal EI sickness benefits, including the one-week EI waiting period.

People should be able to focus on their health when they're ill and not worrying about their jobs. This is about preserving the dignity of people during their most vulnerable time.

We heard from people who say, "We don't walk around with a sticky taped to us, or a sign saying, 'I'm battling cancer.' 'I'm living with multiple sclerosis.' 'I'm living a life today with Crohn's and ulcerative colitis.'" This is something people deal with in silence often, and they need to know that during these at times episodic flare-ups, or at times when they're undergoing intensive chemotherapy, for example, their job is protected.

We've read stories. I read a recent report in the CBC about a worker who died battling cancer, not taking that time off because of the need to work. We're ensuring their jobs are protected so that they don't have to worry about their job when they need to be worrying about the most important thing: their health.

1330

So this is an important bill, and I want to thank the many organizations who've shared stories, a couple of the speakers I mentioned over the course of this week who we've profiled and championed their voices—because it's not about politicians, it's about hearing their voices. These are the real people whose lives are being affected in a positive way and who've been articulating to us the need to do this, so I want to thank them.

I also want to talk about supporting families, not just, of course, in the home, but supporting families at work, particularly women in the workplace. Careers in the skilled trades are needed in the province of Ontario. We've got the largest low-carbon public transit project right now, the Ontario Line. We're moving tunnel—tunneling. We've got Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass, the Bruce Power refurbishment, the Darlington refurb. You heard from the Minister of Energy this week: the largest energy procurement identifying three OPG sites for new energy, one of which is in my home community, the municipality of Port Hope. This presents a remarkable opportunity for thousands upon thousands of high-paying, good jobs in our community to ensure Ontario continues to be a leader in energy production—low-carbon, net-zero energy production.

To do all of this, we'd be foolish to do it leaving 50% of our workforce behind: women. That's why we've taken steps in the construction space to ensure properly fitting PPE for women. Now we're taking steps to expand that across all work sites.

Speaker, I've been shaped by the stories I've heard from the young women at Humber College. They all said that, when out in job placements, they've encountered it. The Canadian Standards Association did a survey that found that 50% of women have said they've reported not using properly fitting PPE. That's why we're taking these steps: for a power line technician who's using gloves two sizes too big, and for women on the job site. I think to stories we've heard from so many women in the trades, maybe perhaps being the first woman on that particular job site, working extra hard, but having to work even harder because the coveralls are two sizes too big. So this common-sense change is an important step.

I recognize that has to go with the new enforcement officers we've brought in line at the ministry. We take an education-first approach, and I want to thank the industry associations and many employers who've already taken the steps. I think to EllisDon, when I was on their job site in Mississauga—very much leading the way. So it's that constant relationship between employers, government and labour all together; the three-legged stool that I've often talked about. We're working together to ensure that women are safe on the job site.

In 2023, as I mentioned, we explicitly required that in construction, and now we're expanding that. This would support the health and safety of all workers, but especially women who've been disproportionately impacted by workplace hazards if they have PPE that just doesn't fit correctly.

As a part of the broader Working for Workers Six package, we're following up on our promise of cleaner washrooms in all workplaces by proposing a new regulation to set out specific requirements for washroom-cleaning records. Those standards that we require on Bay Street—putting those same standards on Main Street. This is a first-in-Canada measure to cover what should be posted and where it must be posted, helping ensure basic health, safety and dignity in the workplace.

I've had a lot of conversations with our labour partners since we last debated this. I affectionately poked fun at my opposition friend and critic about some of the remarks made there, and I've spoken with a lot of labour unions and visited a number of sites. As I mentioned, we're working together, and I've always welcomed his constructive criticism to bring a higher standard onto the workplace. And that's what we're doing. That's at the heart of these Working for Workers bills. It starts with those robust standards, and then working with employers, like through the \$400 million we're unlocking through the WSIB to help smaller employers elevate health and sanitary standards on a job site. That's a big, big announcement that the Premier and I made at the Ontario chamber.

We're listening. We're making sure changes to ensure all workers' needs are reflected in workplace and safety laws and welcoming more women into the trades. And it's working. The statistics from Skilled Trades Ontario: We've seen a 30% increase in women registration in apprentices in 2023. Statistically, that is an important stat, because more women are getting exposed. It's in part due to the effort that this government has placed on the trades. It's in part due to putting more money back in workers' pockets, ending the stigma. It's in part due to the Level Up! career fairs that we've expanded across Ontario. We're the first government to do that.

And I just had a great lunch with Ian Howcroft from Skills Ontario. He's doing great work.

Guess who has backed those new mobile trucks that are going into northern and rural communities? There's going to be four on the roads now.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: And LaSalle.

Hon. David Piccini: And LaSalle—you know what? We don't forget the good people of LaSalle. We don't forget the good people in Cobourg, or Hiawatha First Nation in my own community.

It's this government, through the leadership of Premier Ford, that's helped those new trade tech trucks that are in every corner of Ontario. We could have seen that in the last 15 years. We didn't. We are, under this Premier.

Speaker, I want to move on to talk about front-line heroes, another group of people we continue to support through our Working for Workers legislation, especially firefighters, wildland firefighters, fire investigators, volunteer firefighters—those who put it all on the line every day, who risk their lives when they go to work.

Of course, we've seen incredible investments through Minister Kerzner's ministry into health and safety, into new equipment. I think to the diesel extraction now happening in rural communities where it hadn't before and work Minister Graydon Smith is doing up in the north with wildland firefighters, giving them actual equipment to fight fires and making investments after neglect from previous governments.

I visited, actually, with Graydon, and I've been up—I know the Premier has too—and we've met a number of front-line workers who have written to us and spoken about feeling heard and listened to and feeling we're making the investments to support them in fighting fires. This government recognizes the risk of our municipal wildland volunteer firefighters every day.

I recently had a chance to appreciate the good firefighters in Cobourg. We have a remarkable partnership between volunteer firefighters and full-time firefighters in my community and the volunteer firefighters, like Ric Ash, who has come down to this place when we took moves on primary-site skin cancer. It's stories like Ric's that keep me motivated in this place and to serve my community.

We're proposing legislative changes to expand support for firefighters, fire investigators, wildland firefighters and wildfire investigators with occupational cancers. These changes would improve presumptive Workplace Safety and Insurance Board coverage for primary-site colorectal cancer and primary-site skin cancer. We're proposing to reduce the required duration of service before diagnosis from 20 to 10 years, the lowest duration of service in Canada, and removing the age requirement for a diagnosis of colorectal cancer before the age of 62—getting rid of that.

But what does that all mean? That means that these firefighters know that when they're battling their health—like I talked about with the 27-week illness, Speaker—when they're battling a disease or a health scare as a result of an occupational exposure—we know firefighters are four times more likely to be diagnosed with cancer—that they're not worrying about whether their families will be supported. This has very real consequences.

I remember my first day on the job—I've often spoken about the call I had with Alisen Bowman about her husband, Craig. That will forever change my life, and we've been friends ever since. I was just down in Welland, actually, to see those firefighters the other day. They invited me down, and I value that ongoing relationship. Actually, I saw the great garden that they have, and I look forward to going back in the spring and summer, when they grow the tomatoes and we can make some pasta sauce. But we spoke about Craig—Opie—a hero. And we spoke about his bravery. In his last few breaths in hospice, he wanted to make sure his family was supported. That's what was going through his mind. That is what we are articulating through these Working for Workers bills: sending a clear message that, yes, your families will be supported.

1340

**But not just that. We're investing in prevention: this \$400 million through WSIB to invest in prevention**, health and safety; the work that I mentioned Minister Kerzner is doing to improve safety. The diesel exposure: That's going down in rural communities like mine, thanks to investments from this government.

These proposals respond to the needs and requests of the firefighting community. Of course, we're going to continue to work with them and work with members opposite, who were talking to me just before I stood up in this place—from the north, wildland firefighters. I'm from rural Ontario, where we have great volunteer firefighters, and I recognize, through trips I've made to the north, that we have remarkable wildland firefighters as well, who deserve the dignity of being reflected in these bills, and they are.

I want to thank everybody in this place. At its core, we're here to do the job, to serve our constituents. They've done theirs. Members here are doing theirs. A big shout-out to my colleague Kevin Holland—I can think of no greater champion. Of course, he is a firefighter, as well, and I want to thank him. As I acknowledge all members in this place, I want to acknowledge his leadership.

I know the member for Ajax will speak more about some other actions we're taking to protect worker health and safety across the province. There's so much in this bill; she's going to speak to some of that.



But I want to move on to talking about keeping costs down for workers and businesses. Under Premier Ford's leadership, we've been working hard to keep costs down for families and businesses and put more money back into people's pockets. Under the Working for Workers Six package, we're cutting costs by removing the \$150 exam fee. We're putting over \$500 back in the pockets of skilled tradesmen and women, back in the pockets of apprentices, saving into the tens of millions for apprentices and journeypersons. This is going to have a real-life impact.

There is no silver bullet, but one of the reasons we had stigmas, one of the reasons we saw fewer young boys and girls going into the trades, was that they didn't have the exposure in high school. We're addressing that with the previous Working for Workers bill, with the focused apprenticeship in the skilled trades. We're addressing it by mandatory tech classes. We're addressing it by having Skills Ontario come out with their Trades and Tech Truck to rural communities like mine, to inspire youth and parents like Allie, who told me after her shift at McDonalds, she went out with her daughter, whom I met the other day. They marched with me in the Orono Christmas parade and loved the experience at our Level Up! skilled trades fair. These are the stories. This is what we're doing to inspire the next generation. There is no one silver bullet, but every single one of those measures, this government has done.

We could have seen that—and I think we should have, in fairness—in previous years, but we know that the direction of this province was a very different direction. It was a direction of a service economy. Why and how do we know that? Because it's written in the records of the forum of Ministers of Labour by the previous Liberal government. Why and how do we know it? Because 300,000 manufacturing jobs left Ontario. How do we know it? Because Bloomberg and other reports said we would get zero dollars of automotive manufacturing investments in Ontario. Well, fast forward to today: Thanks to people like MPP Leardi and MPP Dowie, we've got \$14 million in payroll—I'm starting to talk with my hands, I'm getting so passionate; Anthony Leardi knows about that—\$14 million in payroll every week to workers that the previous government turned their back on.

But we're not stopping there: St. Thomas, the refurb, new nuclear, new wind, new solar, new hydroelectric. People have to get that done—the Ontario Line. We're keeping costs down. Previous government Liberals taxed the trades, and we know they would continue to do that if ever given the chance. We've removed those fees. We made it easier to get into the trades.

Today is our last day of Level Up!—6,000 in a day in Mississauga, just to give you an example. But all of those investments don't just happen. They happen because you create a competitive climate. Premier Ford and I announced lowering the payroll tax to add to a reduction in class A and B electricity rates. That is creating a competitive economy, putting \$2 billion back into safe employers in the province of Ontario through our surplus distribution. For a small construction business with 50 employees, that's \$46,000. Or for a smaller business, we're seeing into the thousands of dollars—for that little pizzeria that I like to go and visit with my wife often. It's savings back into that safe employer's pockets. And we announced unlocking \$400 million to support employers to continue to take steps to support a safe workplace.

So, as you create the climate to bring investment, bring the multi-billion-dollar investments we've seen—again, almost \$50 billion in automotive investments. That's unheard of—to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, who has been working so hard promoting Ontario.

Lowering taxes: We've said we will never raise a tax. We haven't; we never will. We know that's not a commitment we've heard other parties make because they taxed Ontarians to death when they had the chance. It takes a stranglehold and it's slow, but it's steady and it drives businesses out.

I remember Kraft. I remember General Electric in communities like mine.

By lowering electricity rates, by working with safe employers, by investing in workers, in better skills—what does a plant manager at Jebco say with those electricity savings? They're investing it back in their workforce because we believe in Ontario's small employers. We believe in the might of the Ontario worker. And we know that, through supporting them with better skills training and development like our \$1.4-billion Skills Development Fund, we know we're going to create a better-trained workforce.

As economies change, as technology disrupts, we will have one consistent thing as everything else changes around us. That's the Ontario worker, knowing that they're supported by this government; knowing that we're investing in their skills training; knowing that more women are entering the trades thanks to this government, more under-represented groups; knowing that that gentleman I met who said he was from my community—and it wasn't until 10 minutes in that I realized he was in the corrections facility in Lindsay but now is working in the trades thanks to 2nd Chance and investments our government is making. What's the net benefit of all of that? Better training, better jobs with bigger paycheques, more people paying taxes, and our GDP and productivity improving.

You know, Speaker, I've spoken at length about immigration and I'm not going to spend the last two minutes I have here talking about that, but I know my colleague the member for Ajax will no doubt touch on it. We're a great province and we've seen what happens when the same group of people and their ideological thinking that drove those jobs out of Ontario—they migrated. They didn't just get the message from the Ontario voter and proudly move into the private sector. Why? Because they don't have that experience. They migrated up to Ottawa and now they're running our country.

We've seen a carbon tax that raises the cost on everything. Our agriculture minister spoke about studies that have shown that it increases tangibly the cost of food, and the cost of food has far outpaced that of the cost of food to our neighbours to the south.

But under this Premier, we're saying we can do better by the Ontario worker, that all of this ideological thinking does nothing to benefit that worker. At the end of the day, they want to know that there's a government that's going to work hard to create the conditions so that they can go to work, that's going to work hard so that when they come back from work at the end of the day and hug their family, they've been protected on the job site. We've introduced some of the toughest penalties on bad actors who have broken that societal contract to look after their workers.

1350

We're investing in workers' skills training and development like no government has before. Our Skills Development Fund—mark my words: I suspect future governments will see that value, and already have and will work with Ontario rather than the cuts to our labour market transfer agreement that we've seen from this federal government. I'm confident that through our Skills Development Fund, our new round, which I am reviewing right now, that we'll continue to support better training, employer-driven training, because it's that relationship between employers, government and labour.

That is why we have been in union training halls, non-union sites in Leeds-Grenville. The common theme I hear from all of them is that they have never seen a government that has taken such an active interest, that has kept such an open door with them to improve the lot of workers.

An Ontario that doesn't work for workers doesn't work at all. Our best days are yet to come. We're going to continue working with employers, working with workers, working with government alike to improve Ontario. Our best days are yet to come, and under this Premier's leadership, we're just getting started. Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Patrice Barnes: I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 229, the Working for Workers Six Act, 2024, alongside the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. I've had the honour of working with him and have seen the dedication and excitement, really, around putting in supports that support workers.

I also want to thank the amazing team at the Ministry of Labour that has spent numerous hours working on this bill, consulting with our stakeholders, doing outreach, changing things that need to be changed, and, again, really being responsive to what our stakeholders have put forward.

Of course, I'd like to thank the Premier for his leadership and support for our government's actions and trailblazing legislation for Ontario workers.

Together, we have shown what it truly means to work for workers, ensuring the Ontario dream remains within the reach of more people.

The minister just covered some important proposals we're making to protect and support workers and their families, including newcomers, women and front-line heroes, as well as to keep costs down for workers and businesses. I'll now expand a bit more on some of the things that are in this bill. I'm again just honoured to be able to support our Ontario workforce.

I'd like to talk about what we're doing with improvements for safety for workers across Ontario. We know that the majority of employers in Ontario are following the law to keep workers safe. However, there are still bad actors—and we see it sometimes in the news—who gamble with lives to save a dollar. That's unacceptable, and this government won't stand for it.

To crack down on employers who repeatedly violate the Occupational Health and Safety Act, we're proposing a minimum \$500,000 fee under the act for corporations found guilty of repeat offences occurring within a two-year period where the offences result in death or a serious injury to one or more workers. That is half a million reasons to take work safety more seriously. We mean it when we say we have no tolerance for bad actors who cut corners on safety.



We're also proposing, to improve safety for workers through OHSA, changes that expand and clarify the powers of the Chief Prevention Officer. If passed, this would help to strengthen and standardize training. The changes would include an increased oversight for safety training, the ability to formally receive advice from section 21 committees and the ability to collect and access occupational health and safety data to measure outcomes and inform future prevention strategies. The Chief Prevention Officer has a valuable role to play in improving workplace safety, and this role could even be more effective, given the right tools.

To protect roadside workers, we're proposing to amend the Highway Traffic Act to expand the current requirement for drivers to slow down and move over when passing emergency vehicles to work-related vehicles at a roadside with flashing amber lights activated, except when the vehicle is within a construction zone with a reduced posted speed limit.

I know that we have all seen it and we understand it. We've seen it on our highways, and we have done that with our police officers when there's an emergency vehicle on the side of the road. By the act, we should change lanes, and so we are doing that as well for when there's a work vehicle that is on the side of the road. We know people get distracted, and oftentimes we have injuries because, while you're rubbernecking, you drive right into that vehicle, causing an accident.

To complement these legislative and regulatory changes, Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer is also developing an action plan for and with the auto sector to address the growing use of lithium-ion batteries and inform future prevention strategies. We are working with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to unlock \$400 million to invest in health and safety programs for injured workers and employers.

We recognize that the EV sector is a driving force within our workplace that is actually hiring workers right now—and the technologies and emerging technology—but we have seen and have experienced some of the challenges that are associated with lithium batteries. We want to make sure that employers and manufacturers that are working on these batteries to put in the EV vehicles of the future are also making sure that they put in place the proper safety standards for workers.

We also continue to advocate and put in place to unlock the \$400 million to invest in health and safety programs. These will be developed by WSIB and focus on mental health, preventive care and chronic injury care and recovery, helping to ensure injured workers have the supports they need to return to work safely and quickly. This includes expanding the WSIB mental health care programming for injured workers to partner with 11 public hospitals and their network of community-based service providers across Ontario. We're working to ensure workers have the care they need, when they need it and where they need it.

In addition to that, we are honouring workers by adding—we are talking about how we can plan to improve safety and well-being through these proposals, but we're also building a stronger Ontario where workers are the backbone of our province. They're everyday heroes building roofs over our heads, keeping our province running, putting food on our tables and caring for the youngest, oldest and most vulnerable members of our communities.

Skilled trades workers, in particular, play an important role in building Ontario. They will help build the infrastructure that communities and municipalities need to grow and prosper and help us to deliver on this government's ambitious capital plan to create the highways, transit, broadband and other infrastructure needed for at least 1.5 million new homes by 2031.

That is why we're bringing forward amendments to proclaim the first week of November as Skilled Trades Week. We think this is an important piece. By establishing trades week, we are recognizing the invaluable contribution and sacrifices of workers who have made and built Ontario. This is including the golden generation of skilled trades workers who built this province into what it is today, as well as giving the skilled trades workers of today and the future the acknowledgment they deserve.

As we continue to do that, we recognize that there is a silver tsunami coming, as the minister says, and so we need to continue to grow Ontario's workforce. To help us to continue to build Ontario, we need to continue to grow that workforce. This means getting more people into rewarding, well-paying careers in the skilled trades, expanding immigration pathways for people that can help fill labour gaps in in-demand sectors and helping skilled newcomers become registered in their profession quickly so they can start living the Ontario dream.

To help grow the skilled trades, we're proposing regulatory changes to create alternative criteria for individuals who cannot meet the current academic standards to register as an apprentice for their chosen trade. This would give more potential apprentices another pathway to start a rewarding career in the trades, and it builds on the enabling legislation passed under the Working for Workers Five Act, 2024.

We're bringing forward an order in council proclaiming April 2 as the in-force day for provisions under the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act that transfer responsibility for certain functions under the act from the minister to Skilled Trades Ontario. This will enable Skilled Trades Ontario to fulfill its mandate to promote careers in the trades, make it easier for skilled trade workers to access services and address employers' needs.

Now, I just want to expand a little bit more on the proposed regulatory change that will see us giving people a different way into the trades. That is what we're talking about. We're talking about opening up skilled trades not just to students who have graduated from high school into college, but to students who might have left high school and not completed college but have become the age of 21 and now they're what would be considered a mature student. They would now have the opportunity to train and become part of our apprenticeship pathway. This is building on the opportunity to grow more skilled trades, giving more people options and giving people the opportunity to become skilled apprentices. There will be a number of criteria that are attached to that—and it would be reaching the age of 21, or they have not received formal education in the past three years. This will help our unions to grow their membership, and, of course, our non-member companies as well. This will enable Skilled Trades Ontario to continue to build on training and to develop pathways by which we can get more apprentices into the skilled trades.

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To help skilled newcomers integrate faster into the labour market and help fill openings in regulated professions quicker, we're proposing a regulatory change to reduce decision-making timelines for regulated professions to make registration decisions about internationally trained applicants—condensed in a shorter time frame, from six months to three months. And we're proposing new regulatory requirements related to application documentation flexibility, parallel processing for regulated professions, and assessment of qualifications for regulated professions and third-party assessments. This would cut out the red tape for people who are ready to fill in-demand jobs—reducing barriers, speeding up registration and improving transparency for applicants.

We have talked about this. Many of us have interacted with immigrants. Many of us have been immigrants who have come to this country, who come with skills that we're not able to bring into the job market, just based on, sometimes, the regulatory pieces that need to be done by different associations that would recognize those credentials. So we're saying to these regulatory organizations, "You need to come up with a faster way to certify our new immigrants, to recognize the skills and the talent they bring, to continue to grow our workforce"—and to, of course, not take away the Canadian dream of actually coming to Canada, establishing a life, getting a job, buying a home and living with your family.

To help employers using the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program to recruit international talent, we're proposing changes to enable implementation of a new employer application model that would make the application process faster and more secure, ultimately cutting red tape and reducing burden to reputable employers. We have talked to stakeholders that are employers that sponsor newcomers to Canada to become part of their workforce, and every time they have to do that, they have to start all over again and actually upload all their documentation. They have to start over like they're doing this for the first time. So what this regulation would do is, it would recognize companies that have historical portion of applying to sponsor new immigrants to Canada. That would make it more streamlined and easier for the employer to upload documents, to fill out the company information. They would get a designation as a trusted employer, so having to fill out that information all over again would not be necessary. This, of course, is going to be based on guidelines. These are companies that have to be trusted. These are companies that have to have shown that they are responsible to the new immigrants they bring over, that they are paying their workers on time, making sure that they're giving these workers ample opportunity to succeed.

Finally, we also propose processing changes to help address the shortage of health care workers by expanding immigration pathways for self-employed physicians using OINP. These changes would create improved permanent residence pathways for self-employed doctors under the OINP, including family physicians and community doctors.

Now, we know that there is a shortage, and we want to encourage doctors to come to Canada and to work in Canada. Effectively, this was a thing in the system where you couldn't really apply as a doctor because it was part of the entrepreneurship pathway. So what we're saying to doctors now that want to come to Canada is that you can apply as a physician. You can be self-employed and actually establish a practice in Canada. We know that our health care system needs additional doctors, so that is another opportunity for us to assist doctors to come to Canada.

Let me move on to the other proposals that the minister and I are putting about today: common-sense changes that put workers first and keep the Ontario dream within reach of more people. They build on the progress we have been making for workers since our first Working for Workers bill in 2021.

This government has been making changes to ensure that women are better supported at work since 2023, when we improved job sites for women by requiring a women-specific washroom on larger job sites, working to ensure that there are clean, well-lit and properly enclosed washrooms on all construction sites, and working to ensure that properly fitting personal protective equipment and clothing be available for workers at construction projects for all body types, making construction work safer and more inclusive. We followed up on our last Working for Workers package by adding requirements, which will come into force January 1, that constructors provide menstrual products on all construction sites. We worked to ensure that clean and sanitary washrooms for workers are in all workplaces, and we modernized the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include virtual harassment in the definition of workplace harassment and workplace sexual harassment.

We have been supporting the health and well-being of front-line heroes over three previous Working for Workers bills since 2023, through continual improvements to presumptive coverage for firefighters. I just want to say, when we went to committee, we had a lot of good discussions with my colleagues from Sudbury around the wildland firefighter coverage, and we recognized that there was a gap there when we talked about the first iteration of the bill. But now, we are actually putting that in, where we're clarifying the calculation of service time requirements for wildland firefighters and wildland fire investigators, to ensure that if a worker is employed as a wildland firefighter for part of a calendar year, that calendar year shall be included as one year of employment. I was very happy with that, and I know the member from Sudbury had some really robust conversation about that in committee. We're just thrilled to correct, again, that oversight that was done, and we'll really be defining that.

We've talked about firefighters and the continual improvements that we've done to presumptive coverage for firefighters. These include expanding presumptive coverage for esophageal cancer and primary-site skin cancer and introducing presumptive coverage for thyroid and pancreatic cancers. In our last package, through the legislative and regulatory changes, we also ensured wildland firefighters and wildland investigators have the same presumptive coverage as their municipal counterparts for certain occupational cancers, heart injuries and PTSD, because, of course, wildland firefighters deserve the same coverage and support for their heroic work to keep us safe.

We also improved employment standard provisions for military reservists in 2022 by expanding the military reservist leave to cover military skills training and reducing the time a reservist needs to be employed before taking leave and, again, in 2023, by expanding the leave to include physical and mental treatment, recovery or rehabilitation related to a military operation or activity, because reservists should be able to focus on their service and recovery without worrying about their work, their jobs.

1410

As we move on, while we've been improving supports for people who have become ill or injured, we've also been working to protect worker safety and prevent those tragedies in the first place. We have been working to address the opioid epidemic's effect on workers, demanding that certain at-risk workplaces have lifesaving naloxone kits on-site and workers trained on how to use them in 2023.

We have demonstrated our seriousness about safety to bad actors in 2022, when we increased the maximum fine for corporations convicted of Occupational Health and Safety Act violations to \$2 million, emphasizing our dedication to putting worker safety above all else. We have been equally firm in protecting employment standards rights, doubling maximum fines for individuals convicted of violating the Employment Standards Act to \$100,000, the highest in the country, and increasing the penalty that an employment standards officer can issue for certain repeat offenders. We continue to send a strong message to unscrupulous employers.

We've also worked on keeping costs down. We're protecting workers' wallets as well as protecting their jobs. In 2024, we ensured fairness for hospitality sector staff by clarifying and introducing some important employment standards. We have done this by:

- clarifying that employers cannot deduct wages when customers dine and dash, gas and dash, or otherwise leave without paying;
- clarifying that employees must be paid for trial shifts;
- requiring employers to disclose if they have a policy of sharing workers' tips by posting it in the workplace; and
- of course, requiring employers who pay wages and tips using direct deposit to allow their employees to select which account and how they want it deposited.

These are important steps in this sector, as we recognize from our stakeholders that employees within the hospitality sector wanted these continual supports, to make these jobs also successful jobs.

The changes we are proposing in this bill to grow Ontario's workforce build on trailblazing actions already made through previous Working for Workers packages. This government has been working to ensure red tape and unfair practices don't stand in the way of newcomers who aspire to contribute to our communities.

In 2023, we introduced changes, proclaimed yesterday, to prohibit provincially regulated employers from including a requirement for Canadian experience in publicly advertised job postings. This was a natural extension of our 2021 prohibition on Canadian work experience as a requirement for registration across 14 regulated professions and Skilled Trades Ontario, which covers 39 occupations, including 23 compulsory trades.

We've also been addressing barriers internationally trained individuals and other applicants may face when applying for registration in regulated professions. Our most recent bill includes changes to improve transparency and accountability for assessment of qualifications by regulated professionals and third parties, and other changes to remove barriers to foreign credential recognition and to speed up registration for applicants looking to contribute to our community. In our fifth Working for Workers package, we also expanded the occupations eligible for the in-demand skills stream of the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, to help to fill labour demands and meet the needs of businesses.

We are also talking about recognizing that we have a lot of immigrants within our communities, but knowing that there are so many who have experienced the challenge of being taken advantage of. And so, within this upcoming bill, we are also going to be tackling that for newcomers, where they have to really put in place regulations around immigration consultants. We know that there is an economy, there is a business that is established, and it's not always with the best of intentions for new immigrants. So we are talking about, and really want to implement, regulations for immigration consultants—mandatory that they need to post their certification; they need to let newcomers know whether or not they're regulated—to cut down on immigration scams. We've seen this as a growing trend within Ontario, and this is something that it is really a heinous crime.

When you find somebody that is new to Canada that is looking for a new opportunity—they come to Canada, they come to Ontario, specifically, and they pay \$5,000, \$6,000 to an immigration consultant. We have heard horror stories of people who have paid and who never got their documentation back, they never heard back from the immigration consultants, or they were given documentation and they think all is well until they get a deportation order. This is devastating for people who have come and sought the opportunity for a better life. Who have probably saved up every penny they have to pay these consultants with the hopes that they'll get to stay in Canada and that somebody is actually looking out for them and helping them to get the proper paperwork to become a worker in Ontario. These are sad stories. These are very sad stories.

I had the opportunity lately to attend the immigrant workers empowering women summit, and the stories there were so empowering. It's run by Svetlana, and she is a powerhouse, to say the least. She came to Canada and she is so thrilled and so empowered about giving back to Canada that she has these seminars for newcomers, especially for women, that empowers them to seek jobs, to ask questions, to create networks—because this is how you give back. She talks about volunteering in Canada; she talks about looking for a job; she talks about supporting each other. It was such an amazing environment. The vibe in that room was great. The women were pumped. I met one young lady who had come to Canada—I think it was three or four years ago—who had just written a book about how to empower a single parent to raise remarkable children while they balance getting settled in Canada and having to work two jobs, having to change your culture, having to grow a new network. She was just so, so thrilled about that and the opportunity to give back.

The further changes in the Working for Workers Five Act, led by the Minister of Education, aim to attract more young people to careers in the skilled trades. And these are also such empowering stories when we talk about our young people. We're seeing that our young people need to grow into and change the stigma around trades. They need to realize that it's a great-paying job. It's a skill that you have for life. But it's not just about changing the minds of students; it's really about changing the minds of parents as well, to change what the thoughts are around the skilled trades and to know that it is definitely a job that—you could probably end up buying your house probably faster than somebody who has gone to university. And so these are some of the changes that we're making that are including grade 11 and 12 high school students to participate in more apprenticeship learning through co-operative credits while completing high school, as well as a new technological education requirement which exposes Ontario students to at least one technological education course that could guide them to a future career in the skilled trades.

Speaker, as you can see, this new package extends groundbreaking supports and improvements already helping workers across the province. We are supporting the health and well-being of workers and their families, we're keeping costs down for workers and businesses, we're honouring workers and we are growing the Ontario

workforce. We're using every tool in our tool box to work harder for workers with each passing year, to both protect workers and keep and attract more workers in Ontario, to ensure our economy remains strong and vibrant.

Speaker, the Working for Workers Six Act is more than just a piece of legislation. It is a promise to every worker in Ontario: Your safety, your well-being and your success matter.

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So we are quite proud of this, and we are bringing this to the House.

I call on all members of the House to join me in supporting Bill 229, the Working for Workers Six Act, 2024. As we get into debate, across the aisles, we recognize that this is a bill that does very, very much for our growing economy and for our growing workforce.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It is now time for questions.

**MPP Jamie West:** Bill 229 isn't technically called Working for Workers version six. It's called An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024, and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters. The nickname, though, for labour bills has been Working for Workers.

You keep saying it's the sixth Working for Workers bill. But you don't include Bill 124, which capped public sector workers at 1%. And you don't include Bill 28, which violated the constitutional rights of people who were EAs in schools, who were using food banks, or for people in the trades at schools who were living with their parents.

I'm just wondering, shouldn't this actually be called Working for Workers version eight?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I am glad that member is keeping a keen eye on the multiple pieces of legislation we're bringing forward to support workers in Ontario.

Because it's Christmas, I'm going to thank that member for our good conversations—for the entire caucus over there, who never shy away, be it after question period, from coming over to seek clarification, or, unlike their Liberal counterparts, actually bringing forward constructive measures to our bills. I want to thank them for it.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Oh, come on. That's not Christmas.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Oh, sorry. I didn't see you were here.

So I want to thank him for that. I hope we get to eight, Speaker. And I want to thank him for his support on this bill.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Questions?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** I am going to ask the minister if he could explain what Skilled Trades Week is and why it's so important.

The reason I bring up this question is because in my riding we have a lovely town called LaSalle, Ontario, and on October 29, LaSalle, Ontario, hosted a Level Up! event from Skills Ontario. It was packed. It was hosted at the LaSalle Event Centre, which is located on Front Road, right on the Detroit River.

I'll tell you, Madam Speaker, one of the most common telephone calls I get in my constituency office is from grandmothers wanting to sign up their grandchildren in the skilled trades. They want to find out how to do it. I'm very pleased to take those telephone calls, and I often refer them to LIUNA Local 625.

So my question to the minister is, could he please explain what Skilled Trades Week is and why it's so important?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I just want to start by acknowledging the member for Scarborough, who has been a champion for young men and women in the trades, and who has done such remarkable advocacy, advocating for Skilled Trades Week. This is a week which, if passed, will remind young men and women that when you have a job in the trades, you have a career for life. Because of MPP Smith's advocacy, I have had the opportunity to get to know a number of organizations working with under-represented groups. He has championed them, and he is championing skilled trades among youth—

**Hon. Graham McGregor:** How about this guy?

**Hon. David Piccini:** And in LaSalle—for young boys and girls; for the extension of, I believe it's Highway 11—  
Interjections: Three.

Hon. David Piccini: Highways 3 and 10.

These are young boys and girls who will grow up, because of MPP Leardi's leadership, knowing that they've got a meaningful career for life. They'll be exposed to it. They'll create awareness at a younger age, thanks to this—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): A reminder: We refer to the members by their ridings.

I recognize the member for Parkdale–High Park.

**Ms. Bhutila Karpoche:** Wage theft is a major issue in Ontario. According to the government's own records, workers are owed \$60 million in unpaid wages that the provincial government has failed to collect from employers. Wage theft is a violation of dignity, it is people's hard-earned income being stolen. We need stronger enforcement to ensure that workers get paid for their work.

My question to the Minister of Labour is, will you ensure that Ontario's workers get the wages that they have worked hard to earn, and can he deliver it by Christmas?

**Hon. David Piccini:** The member is right: any dollar outstanding is a dollar we've got to collect, and that's what we're working to do. I think the member has to recognize that there are a series of changes. The member would know closely that we worked with steelworkers on this, and we're going to continue working with them to continue to improve this.

It starts with ensuring there are appropriate fines. It's this government that has made those changes. It starts with ensuring not only the appropriate fines, but you're doing proactive visits. It's this government doing that. We have more enforcement officers, again, doing proactive visits—this government is doing that. We'll continue to work. We've cracked down on temporary help agencies.

We're not going to stop there and we're going to continue to work to address—to ensure that these wages are returned where they belong: to the workers who earned it.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Questions?

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** I want to thank the minister and the parliamentary assistant for this bill. For someone like myself who comes out of Ford Motor Co., I see the importance of our skilled trades throughout the province of Ontario—our electricians, our pipe fitters, our carpenters. My nephew Anthony just became an electrician, and he's so proud of his new job that he has. He's already thinking about getting married and buying a house.

How can we take away the stigma for our children to get into the skilled trades?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Ajax.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Those are the stories that we hear and those are the stories that we need to continue to tell. I was at the carpenters' union. They had opened their new training centre, and there was a young man there that I met who, within a couple of months, had completed his certification, he had opened his own business and now he was hiring three other carpenters to scale and to grow his business. So I think talking about these stories is so important. I think we have heard that from our government where we're really talking about the importance of skilled trades, the fact that it's a job for life, the fact that it's a great-paying job, the fact that you can actually get into a skilled trade without a large debt.

So this is what we need to continue to talk about, the stories about success, about what that Ontario dream looks like, and maybe we start talking about the students—

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I was glad to hear that sexual harassment is included in what you're thinking about in terms of workplace safety, but the reality is that sexual assault, rape cases are not making it to court, so women, in fact, are not being protected. An industrial work site is like any other work site, those risks are there.

My question is, will the members on that side and will the minister please pressure the Attorney General to actually hire the judges who are necessary and the people in courts so that these court cases are actually heard and women don't continue to be victimized?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

**Hon. David Piccini:** Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for that question. It is a despicable, heinous act that deserves to be punished and to face the full extent of the law. This Attorney General is addressing backlogs, has brought in more into the judiciary. But judges can only deal with the law that's given to them, so Bill C-75 that weakened the Criminal Code has been incredibly detrimental. We've seen it on the streets of Toronto, we've seen it with heinous crimes, and it's because of the weak-on-crime federal government.

This government is introducing mandatory minimums so that activist judges can't go light on bad-actor employers where workers pass away, and thank you to the steelworkers' union for working with us to implement this measure.



We're going to get tough on crime—and that member is right: We're going to make sure that this stuff doesn't happen in this great province of Ontario.

1430

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): That's the time we have for questions.

Moving on to further debate.

**MPP Jamie West:** Before I forget, I want to mention that I will be sharing my time with the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North.

As I said earlier—we are debating Bill 229—the government frequently likes to call the bill, Working for Workers, with labour bill. The official title, though, is An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and other matters.

I asked, just recently, why they wouldn't include Bill 124, which is also a labour bill. Bill 124 was modelled after the Liberal Bill 115. Under Bill 115, what they did is they focused on education workers and capped their wages, violating constitutional rights, at 1%. It cost a fortune in legal bills and backpay as well. Bill 124 basically was a “hold my beer” bill where they got to everyone in the public sector. Many organizations are still suffering from this, because as it was challenged in court—it was lost; it was lost with the Liberals as well. But as they get into collective bargaining, there is no funding for not-for-profits in order to offset what the provincial government had done to them under Bill 124.

Similarly, Bill 28 was also a labour bill. This is the bill—you might remember—where these workers went out in protest. These were workers who are child care workers, cleaners, tradespeople in our schools. I know we talk about how great tradespeople jobs are, but there are actually tradespeople working in schools who make a lot less money, and they do it because they love the kids. I brought forward examples of a cleaner who is going to the food bank with her children—couldn't even afford child care, had to bring her kids with her; couldn't even hide from her kids they were going to the food bank. Also, there were tradespeople who had to move back in with their parents because they couldn't afford rent.

These are bills that, to me, reflect the Conservative government's attitude when it comes to workers. They will talk about workers in the best of times—we're going to be talking about firefighters, and absolutely firefighters are heroes. We all agree with it. We all support it. It was actually a New Democrat who brought forward the first bill for presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters. I want to thank my colleague—I can't use his name so I'm going to look it up—the member from Niagara Centre, who brought it forward. It was adopted by the Conservatives, and we all agree on this—and we really do. But in my heart of hearts, I have a feeling that if firefighters were allowed to strike—they're not—I don't know if you would see a Conservative on a firefighter picket line.

I know you saw New Democrats out with education workers who basically were going to food banks, and then their constitutional rights were violated. For the Conservative government, that was so unpopular—the public had such a backlash—they had to walk it back. New Democrats were there from day one, right away. Education workers, we're standing with them; TVO workers, we were with them; ACTRA workers—who I'll be talking about later—we were with them. We stand with workers in the good times but we're also there to fight for them in the worst of times, to stand up for them in the worst of times.

Interjections.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you.

CUPW, the postal workers, are on strike right now, and you know what their main leverage in that strike is? Anti-scab legislation, because they're federal workers. Federally there's anti-scab legislation. It was forced through by a New Democratic government. There's no way Justin Trudeau would have voted for this if we didn't have that leverage. And then Pierre Poilievre has been walking around talking about how much he loves workers, so he couldn't vote against it. Now postal workers have the strength to stand on the picket line knowing no one is going to cross their line and do the work for them. It forces shorter strikes, shorter lock-outs and more meaningful negotiations.

So absolutely, on this side, we agree with you. Firefighters are amazing and they're heroes and they need that presumptive coverage. We also have tradespeople—my colleague right here is a tradesperson; I was a tradesperson in the past. They're very important, and presumptive coverage is always welcome news. Anything we can do to get more people into the trades is always welcome.

But I do want to talk about the wildland firefighters. Now, Speaker, you may have seen the multitude of notes being passed back and forth from here, because during debate, the PA and the minister were saying that the wildland firefighters are absolutely covered, so we had our researchers look back and forth. I have to say—this is a common complaint that I have—this bill was tabled yesterday. They’ve been doing press conferences all week and so, as a detective, you can piece out kind of what’s in there, but you don’t know all the details. But the bill was tabled yesterday, so we’ve got to work with the researchers and figure out what we’re going to talk about in a relatively short amount of time. Just after petitions, the minister came over and told my colleague, our WSIB critic, that the wildland firefighters are covered, and in debate, the minister and the PA also said that they’re covered. We went back and forth to look through this: We couldn’t find it in the bill.

Now, it’s a frustrating experience, because there was the opportunity in amendments in the previous labour bill to address this. We brought it forward as New Democrats, and we explained how it would address it. We explained that we thought that the ministry probably just made an omission. I didn’t think the intent was to exclude them in the previous bill. I’m starting to think maybe it was, honestly, because they voted against those amendments.

I explained during the amendments, during the debate. I said, “I think this was just one of those things where it’s out of sight, out of mind, and it’s a clerical error. We can fix this with an amendment.” The Conservative government voted against it. I can’t remember if there were two or three amendments—two, at least—to address this. They voted it down. The opportunity was to bring it back there, and we’re being told, “Well, it’s going to be in regulations. It’s going to be here.”

Let me find out what I have here. In the notes that I have, basically—I think this is helpful.

Why should we or wildland firefighters or anyone in Ontario trust the recognition of service to be included in the regs? Why not put it in the bill? Other qualifying periods for other firefighters around presumptive coverage are in the bill.

So I want to have this record. I hope that the minister and the PA are going to address this, but the reality is, if I don’t get it on record, many of the bills are being fast-tracked and not going to committee and being time-allocated and rushed through. I think that people like Noah Freedman, who on a regular basis is in the gallery, come out here to talk about how important this was and provide as much information as possible. We need to get this on the record.

For OPSEU, who represents these amazing wildland firefighters, it feels like the government intentionally is excluding wildland firefighters from the inclusion of WSIB presumptive coverage. If you look in the definition, it sounds like they’re being excluded. They talk about firefighters and fire investigators, but they don’t say “wildland firefighter,” and the devil is in the details.

Many of my colleagues on the opposite side are lawyers—and I would assume amazing lawyers, because they’re all King’s Counsel—so they would know that wording is really, really important. When you change the wording, it makes it very easy for WSIB to say, “No, no, no. Not you.” And I’ll tell you, WSIB’s favourite thing to say is, “No, no, no,” on a regular basis.

I want to have this on the record. I’m going to read this statement from my friend Noah Freedman, who has been doing an amazing job, from the Ontario wildland firefighters. He’s also incident commander and OPSEU local vice-president.

“On February 26, 2024, Minister Piccini promised to reclassify wildland firefighters, in the Legislature, and provide us with the same presumptive coverage for heart disease, cancer and other chronic illnesses afforded to every other firefighter. Minister Piccini promised us those things almost a year ago today.” If you’re watching a recording, it’s December 2024 today.

“Since then, Working for Workers 4 has received royal assent. Working for Workers 5 has received royal assent. And now, Working for Workers 6 is up for debate. And yet,” the Minister of Labour—sorry; I can’t say the minister’s name in the standing orders, just to explain—“has broken his promise....” I don’t know if I can say that. He hasn’t fulfilled his promise yet, “treating us like second-class first responders, by intentionally excluding wildland firefighters from inclusion in presumptive coverage, and from being reclassified and recognized as firefighters.”

Minister of Labour, “you are right that no matter what is included in this bill, we will never stop doing our job to protect Ontarians, risking our lives and sacrificing our long-term health, battling wildfires on the front lines, but we will also never stop advocating for ourselves, and making sure that” the Minister of Labour, and the Conservative government, “keeps their promise to reclassify wildland firefighters and include us in presumptive coverage.”

So I'm very hopeful that this is going to get to amendments, because if we cannot fix this, you can guarantee, Noah, that New Democrats again will bring this forward through amendments and we will force a recorded vote. That's the opportunity for the Conservative government to say, "We're addressing this. We're fixing it. We should be more clear," or to put their money where their mouth is and to say, "Look, what we want to do is just have a photo with you. Can you bring your hard hat, your fire hat? Can you bring your gear with you? Maybe show up in uniform so we can get a photo, because I want to send that out in my newsletter that I met with wildland firefighters and talk about what heroes they are, but I don't want to really give the coverage that they deserve, that the other firefighters would have."

1440

I'm going to go on. I think as well, in a lot of these bills, there's a lot of focus on tradespeople and firefighters. I don't know if maybe the Minister of Labour doesn't know, or if Conservatives don't understand, there are a lot of workers out there who are not firefighters and who are not tradespeople. There's a sprinkling of stuff for other workers; I'm not pretending there's not. I talked about Bill 124. There is a shortage of health care people because of Bill 124. It happened during COVID-19. The nurses primarily and lots of health care workers felt completely disrespected. COVID-19 is still affecting people in the province. We're not having lockdowns like in the past and it's not front and centre like it used to be, but our nurses are burning out and quitting, retiring early and refusing to come back as retirees to help train new nurses.

Nurses who are graduating: Even though they talk about how many nurses are going to school, I was at a graduation ceremony where I congratulated this young lady for becoming a nurse. She said almost with a laugh, "I'm never working in that field." She had placements as a nurse and she knew, "I'm never doing that, but I've already paid the tuition so I might as well get my degree, but I'm not going to work in that field." That's how toxic and bad it is.

The thing is there is a path to fix this, right? The path is not capping wages and treating nurses like second-class citizens. The path is maybe treating the nurses like you are for nursing staffing agencies.

This Conservative government, they love to blow taxpayer money. They spent \$1 billion on nursing staffing agencies. Now, I'm not putting down all nursing staffing agencies because there are sectors where that's needed—primarily they bring people to remote communities and that sort of thing—but not to the extent that it is right now. I'm being told by health care providers, "I can blow the budget and go into reserves for private staffing agencies, but I cannot hire more of a complement of regular agencies." What happens is that you are paying these private staffing nurses almost twice what a normal nurse would be.

Interjection: Three times.

MPP Jamie West: My colleague says three times.

On top of that, there's a little slice of the cheddar that goes to the company they work for. I have a feeling that that's where the Conservatives—when they talk about working for workers, they're talking about the board of directors, the executives who are making that profit. That's the focus. They give the money and they drain the bank account. That would be fine if it was a private bank account, but it's taxpayer dollars.

When people, or workers, go to hospital and there is a shortage of nurses and a backlog, it is by design. The Conservative government is deliberately underfunding them, shovelling that money into private agencies and workers are paying the price. So when you bring your kid in the middle of the night and you're sitting in the emergency room for hours and hours and hours literally—you're lucky if you're out of there in six hours—it is by design because they're not investing in it.

I want to talk as well about other workers. Let me just get here—because I don't want to forget about ACTRA. These ACTRA commercial workers—this is unbelievable. People in the gallery haven't heard this before. Can you imagine this? For these workers, basically, their way of life is being stripped. They are asked to have much more reduced benefits, either gutting their pensions completely—this is how they supplement in Canada. They don't have a Hollywood industry, so a lot of actors supplement their acting and their live performance by doing commercials. That's how they make ends meet and they can perform in the field that they love.

What happened in April 2022 is that these agencies locked them out because they wouldn't accept the contract—April 2022. It's November 2024 today. That's an embarrassing thing.

On the one-year anniversary, we asked the Minister of Labour, we asked the Premier, "Will you stop buying ads?" The Premier is spending a fortune of taxpayer dollars on ads telling you how great Ontario is. "Will you stop buying

ads by the companies that locked out these agencies? You don't have to pick sides. Just stop buying. There are other agencies that will provide this work." They continue to buy ads.

On the second-year anniversary, I asked again, "Will you stop buying ads?" The Minister of Labour met with the ACTRA workers just outside the door over here and said, "I'm going to look into this. I've got to find out what's going on here."

I don't know what he thought he was going to look into because shortly thereafter, there was a posting for a Ministry of Labour ad specifying non-union actors. So not only are they buying ads, they're deliberately saying, "Look, I know ACTRA has been locked out"—not even a strike. They've been locked out for two years. They would love to be negotiating and getting a fair contract. It's been two years, and the Conservative government could care less. "Not only do we not care less, I'm going to buy some more ads, specifically outlining not to use unionized actors."

At the federal level, the federal government—because the NDP has pressured them—have agreed that if you see any federal advertising, it is not done with these agencies who have locked out these actual workers. All we're asking as New Democrats is that Conservatives follow that example, but they won't. Because "Working for Workers" is a buzzword; it is not what they believe. Because if they did, these workers would not still be locked out and they would not be ignored. It's coming into 1,000 days—1,000 days just happens in January. We won't be sitting, but I can tell you, we're going to make some news on the 1,000th day because this government cannot continue to ignore workers and pretend they're working for workers on a regular basis, no matter how many \$200 cheques you hand out.

Now, we've talked in the past about these \$200 cheques that were coming out. Coincidentally, there's going to be an election soon—\$200 cheques, and the government was saying, "Oh, so you don't want people to have 200 bucks?" Absolutely I do. Do you know why? Because your policies have failed the workers of Ontario. So it's like seeing somebody who's going to a food bank and saying, "Oh, so you don't want us to give them a coupon so they can get a hamburger at McDonalds?" Yes, give them the coupon. Also pay them a rate so that they're not going to food banks.

The Feed Ontario report just came out. One in five workers now are going to food banks—one in five. If you have seen the ads that they have spent millions of dollars on—\$48 million of taxpayer dollars to tell you to "imagine Ontario." I want you to imagine Ontario when one in five workers are going to food banks and imagine Ontario where the Conservative government is telling you, "That's okay." Because it's not okay. It is not okay.

I will tell you—and I will argue with anyone and I'll tell you, I'll win. But if we go to any Tim Hortons, any subway stop anywhere in this province and we say, "Do you think workers should be going to food banks?" They will say, "No, no, no, no." If you are working, you should be able to buy food. You should have money at the end of the day after you pay your rent. You should be able to get food on the table, take care of your kids, cover your expenses and have a couple of bucks at the end of the day so you can save towards a house or help your kids go to post-secondary or get tools for their trade school or something like that. And the way the government has been ignoring the affordability crisis in Ontario is simply shameful.

Today there was a conversation about a woman who was in her seventies being rent-evicted. The landlord had a YouTube video about how to rent-evict tenants. The Attorney General, a Conservative, kind of shrugged his shoulders: "It's a process, it's going to work out." Come on. Come on. We know people are being evicted on a regular basis. I'm not saying every tenant is a saint but if 90% of tenants are losing at the LTB and being kicked out, maybe there's something wrong with the LTB. If your policy for preventing these encampments we're seeing all over the place right now is that you're going to remove rent control on any rental unit after 2018, you are giving these developers a licence to print money, and they are printing money on the backs of our seniors, our students and just about everyone in between. That's shameful because our kids cannot move out of our houses because of policies the Conservative government has brought forward.

I want to talk about the steelworkers; talking about—there are more workers out there. Now, a lot of these bills have included presumptive cancer coverage, and the steelworkers brought forward—the minister talked about the steelworkers a couple of times and I'll get into that.

So I reached out to the steelworkers. I was a steelworker before; I know all the people in health and safety and occupational disease. And so: "Research from the Occupational Cancer Research Centre based at the University of Toronto"—we respect them—"has shown that underground workers are some of the highest exposed to carcinogens ... Furthermore, the occupational health clinic for Ontario workers recently released a report indicating that mine workers have a significant increased risk to lung cancer..." Basically what that means is that miners are getting

cancer at a large rate. The thing is, I don't think that miners are as cool to pose for photos with as firefighters are. And I'm not discounting the firefighters; absolutely, they need that coverage. But other workers are having the problem too.

In the email, they said they would love to have the "opportunity for the reintroduction of the Justice for Victims of Occupational Disease Act" and have it passed, obviously. "This bill codifies the proper legal test to be used for entitlement" in occupational disease claims. It "would help expand schedules 3 and 4 in Regulation 175/98 which in turn would make the process easier for claims that fall within those presumptions prescribed by sections 15(3) and 15(4) respectively."

1450

It goes on more—I don't want to bore people with it because this is kind of into the weeds a bit, but let me read this quote:

"While Ontario has one of the strongest health and safety records of any jurisdiction anywhere, too many workers are falling through the cracks when it comes to occupational illness." Do you know who that was? The Minister of Labour. Then he says, "Under the leadership of Premier"—I can't say his name, but the Premier—our Conservative "government will leave no stone unturned to ensure we have the best science and data ... to protect workers and make room for everyone's voice at the table as we build a stronger system that works for everyone."

It sounds like he wants to address this, but he isn't.

And we can't wait for Working for Workers bills 17, 19 or 55 to roll out before you start talking about miners. Mining is important. One of those ads that your taxpayer dollars is paying for, it's got a non-unionized actor pretending to be a miner underground. That guy, if he was actually underground working, would be breathing diesel dust, silica and things that would give him cancer.

They want to remove indexing—just because I'm looking at my time; I'm going to run out of time. Their third ask was that Ontario should raise the loss of earnings to 90% as was promised. We brought this forward in multiple amendments. Basically, every time you have a labour bill, we bring forward the amendment to increase indexing from 85% to 90% and, oddly, 5% doesn't sound like a ton, but I've talked to injured workers, as has the committee with members of government and the independent members, and we've heard how important this would be to them, what a change it would make to their life. Because the reality is, if you get hurt in Ontario, you're more likely to be on ODSP than back to work. You are desperately, desperately going to be poor, because the Liberal government didn't care about you and the Conservative government could care less.

The final thing—and this is important because we've had many times when we've talked about seniors in this House and people talk about how important they are, and I agree with that 100%, but let's hear about this: Section 43 of the WSIA also allows the WSIB to end loss of earnings when a worker turns 65 years old. We're seeing more and more people working past this age as the cost of living rises. If you go to a Walmart or somewhere, the greeter is probably a senior. If you go to a Tim Hortons, half the workforce are seniors. It's great if you want to be, but it's terrible if you have to be. If you're getting old and sore and you have to work a minimum-wage job to make ends meet—and you're injured, and the ministry, the Conservative government, instead of having your back, is pushing you on your back, by saying, "No more WSIB for you because now you're 65 and you're retired." That has to be changed. These are the voices we have to bring forward.

I want to talk about a couple of validators because sometimes they go, "You know Jamie, he just doesn't like us." I want to talk about Josh. Josh is a miner. Josh's leg was impaled by a four-foot piece of rebar underground, and his family depends on him and his income to make ends meet. Much to his surprise, the WSIB uses a loophole to cap his loss of earnings, and because he's a higher-income earner—like tradespeople, miners make good money—it's an even bigger cap. And the Conservative government is okay with that. They're okay with it. That guy in the commercial, if he got a piece of rebar in his leg, he would lose his way of life. So workers like Josh should be paid fair compensation and not have the money returned to their bosses. There's a thing in here where millions of dollars are going back to bosses and not to employees. I'm going to get into that if I have—I'm going to make sure I have time.

Denis Brunette, millwright, had an accident underground and they had to amputate his leg. He had extensive rehab and had a prosthetic leg made—multiple years. So what happened was about 450 pounds landed on top of him and they ended up amputating his leg. It hit him in the head, hit him in the stomach, hit him in the groin—extensive rehab, multiple years of recovery. His doctor wrote a letter saying his prostate was affected as a direct result of the damage to the groin. WSIB, without even seeing Denis, overturned this. His wife is saying, "What do you mean?" His

doctor, who was there, who recommended the surgeries, who inspected him, who looked literally inside him, is saying that this is what happened, and then this paper doctor is like “Nah.” This happens all the time, these paper doctors overruling people who are giving—because WSIB isn’t about protecting workers, it’s about protecting workers from getting money.

WSIB was supposed to go on a work tour with Denis—never happened. So how would they know the scope of the work the worker was doing? So his licence was revoked. He couldn’t be a millwright anymore. He lost countless dollars in his pay. They told him he was 74% disabled; he gets 21% coverage. He has not been paid from May to October last year. He’s trying to return back to work as of October this year. He hasn’t received any pay because he’s able to work now. He hasn’t got a job yet, so WSIB cut him off because he has a phantom job. And at the end of the month, he’s going to pay his bills with phantom money. I wanted to get it on the mike. I could read one of these every day for the rest of your life: workers who have been failed by the Conservative government, and the Liberals taught them how to fail them.

I want to talk about other workers because I only have about five minutes before my colleague is going to get up. Not-for-profits are starving for money. They made a claim last year for a 5% increase. I don’t understand how 5% would get them anywhere because they are so far behind. The number one thing you’ll hear from workers in a not-for-profit is, when they leave, they say, “I don’t want to leave; I can’t afford to stay. I love my job.”

Public health is underfunded. EAs are going to work wearing PPE—they’re also underfunded and not paid properly. Child care workers are exiting because they’re not paid properly. Autism supports aren’t funded. You want to talk about workers who need help? There is a 74,000 backlog of families with autistic children who aren’t receiving supports. Salvation Army was here yesterday; they need supports. Women’s centres aren’t receiving supports, and people can’t work there. Amelia Rising in Nipissing and North Bay, who helps victims of sexual assault, needs funding to survive.

And not to mention, on top of not funding these very important sectors, \$60 million in wage theft that the Minister of Labour hasn’t bothered to pick up—\$60 million. And that \$60 million is only people who reported it and thought there was a chance of getting it back. That’s what’s embarrassing in here.

The minister had said at one point, “I talked to the steelworkers. I listened to what they said.” The whole story of that is, basically, a steel car has killed a variety of workers, and the penalties are like nothing. It feels like it’s the cost of doing business for some employers.

So Kevon Stewart, who’s the director of the steelworkers, had a meeting with Myles Sullivan, who was the previous director and now he’s gone on to the national office. They said, “Look, if there are companies out there—bad bosses, whatever they want to call them—who think it’s the cost of doing business, make it cost.” And they recommended a million dollars. This bill doesn’t say a million dollars, even though he said, “I followed their advice.”

The other thing, too, is I called Kevon—I’ve known Kevon forever; I’ve known Myles even longer. I called him and I said, “Well, what happened here? How’s it going?” And they are moving forward and it’s a positive thing, but Kevon said, “Look, make no mistake: That money is going to the government.” So when you’re looking at the \$48 million in taxpayer-paid advertising, some of that money could be coming from people who died. There’s not an injured worker who has died on the job or anyone in that family who has ever thought, “I hope there is a penalty that this company has to pay that goes to the Ministry of Labour.” It should go to the workers, to their family. It should go to the people who are hurting the most.

I know personally, sadly, four families affected by workplace fatalities where I worked. Every year, I message them and let them know that I’m thinking about them on the anniversaries. I know that they never forget what happened, that money won’t bring them back. But it’s a slap in the face to say, “There was a fine or we’ve increased the minimum fines so that everyone’s going to get a fine, and not one red cent is going to go to you, your sister, your brother, your mom, your dad or your daughter.” That’s a slap in the face to workers. Don’t tell me you’re working for workers and do stuff like this where you leave workers behind on a regular basis.

When we are seeing encampments grow because workers on ODSP are losing their housing, workers who are injured are losing their housing, minimum-wage workers are losing their housing, you’re not working for workers. You’re picking and choosing for the photo ops and the headlines, but you’re not standing up for workers.

If you’re not, I urge you, in the five months that we weren’t sitting, and when the House rises at Christmas, get into your office. Listen to what people are saying when they come to your office, because all of our offices are the complaint department. No one comes and says, “I got my licence.” “I didn’t get my licence,” they come. So they



will tell you they're being evicted or they don't have enough money. Then you can talk about working for workers once you start addressing those basic needs and helping them.

I'm going to sit down and share the rest of the time with my colleague from Thunder Bay–Superior North.

1500

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North.

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** I really want to start with this idea that Ontario is returning over \$2.5 billion in rebates to businesses. The headline says the province is putting more money back into workers' pockets, but they're certainly not putting money back into the pockets of injured workers. They're taking money out of the pockets of injured workers. And all workers are potential injured workers. If we don't have that backstop there, we are not, in fact, working for workers at all. We are working to use workers up while they're fit and healthy, but once they are not, we are throwing them under the bus.

I'd like to read a letter from the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups:

"Every year in the lead up to the holiday season, countless Ontarians look forward to gathering with their family and friends to share food, presents, and good company.

"For those forced into poverty by work injury or illness and related disabilities, comfort and joy is not so easy to come by. Decades of cuts to injured worker benefits through practices like deeming"—that's when you pretend an injured worker has a job that they cannot get, and then cutting their benefits—"massive denial rates (especially in psychological injuries and occupational illness), cuts to health care, and ignoring the diagnoses and advice of injured worker's actual treating doctors have left many permanently injured and ill workers in financial and emotional ruin. These practices have created massive surpluses for the WSIB. Heading into a potential spring election, injured workers had begun to wonder out loud if some of their decimated benefits might be restored with all the extra money the compensation board brags about having in their bank.

"Imagine our shock today, then, when WSIB announced that instead of restoring decades of cuts to injured workers, they are simply handing \$2.5 billion to the very employers who have left us injured, ill, and poor....

"Study after study show that permanently injured and ill workers face poverty, stigma and a cascading set of health effects that can cause people to lose their homes, their families and the lives they once knew. Instead of addressing this known problem, the WSIB" and the Conservative government have "chosen to make wealthy employers \$2.5 billion wealthier as they head into 2025. Shame on them."

I'll go a little bit further. The government is promising this rebate to any company that hasn't had more than one conviction in the last four years. This is a joke and good news for bad employers, seeing as enforcement numbers are down, which means conviction numbers are down too. Only "safe businesses" get the rebate. Ministry of Labour inspections, orders and fines have dropped significantly, just like employment standards inspections, so almost no businesses get fined or prosecuted.

This government could have announced an end to the WSIB practice of deeming but they chose not to. They could have done something about claim suppression, but they didn't. New Democrats and injured workers have called on this government to increase loss-of-earning rates injured workers receive to help raise them out of poverty. But the current 85% of earnings—we wanted to return the 85% of earnings to 90%. This is particularly important for older workers, but the Conservative government apparently doesn't care.

In 1998, the Conservative Mike Harris government cut benefit rates from 90% of net to 85% of net, and then cut contribution for loss of retirement income from 10% to 5% because they claimed the WSIB was in a financial crisis. Every request to improve workers' compensation, or at least reverse the cut since 1998, has been met with the response that injured workers have to tighten their belts and wait until the WSIB finances have recovered.

But, before the last election in 2022, the Ford government gave \$1.2 billion to employers in WSIB rebates. Once again, as we head into a provincial election, the Ford government announces that the WSIB has billions of dollars to give to employers in rebates—but still, nothing for injured workers. Injured workers continue to struggle with reduced benefits that are cut off at age 65, even though they would not have stopped working if they had not been injured on the job. The WSIB is a worker's compensation system. It's not supposed to be an employer compensation system, but that is the way it's being used.

I want to look at one of the reasons that there's a surplus, and it comes out of this experience rating. That was a change made some time ago, I believe, during the Harris government. It has shifted a few times, but it's still basically the same thing. Experience rating in workers' compensation links the costs for workplace injury or

disease—only the money paid out by the WSIB to injured workers—to the amount the businesses will pay each year. This has created an incentive for companies to focus on reducing those costs, as opposed to helping their injured and disabled workers. Many companies have been trained by the WSIB and industry consultants to “manage claims,” which means managing costs. Managing costs results in shifting those costs onto the worker, their families and our public health care system. The other behaviour this encourages is hiding the accident, suppressing claims to the WSIB, thereby undercutting good health and safety practices, which results in more accidents and injuries in the future. All firms are now 100% experience-rated in Ontario.

I’ll continue on this. We know what “minimize the costs of claims” means: lower costs, lower figures on the claims-cost column. In real life, it means discouraging workers from reporting their accident or, once reported, to quickly return to their workplace, regardless of the severity of the injury and medical advice. In real life, it means mental and financial stress for the worker and their family and too often, a second injury, or the transformation of a temporary condition into a permanent one. In real life, it means the loss of both employment and compensation income. In real life, it means not actually lowering the cost but shifting it. The myriad of harms experienced by injured workers and their families include family break-up and loss of home. That is the cost of that shift.

In other words, there are these various incentives for companies not to report accidents. Those incentives get pressed onto other workers as well, who are often offered things like, “We’re going to buy leather jackets for everybody here, as long as we don’t report any accidents.” It doesn’t mean the accidents don’t happen.

We actually know that inspections are not taking place or they’re seldom taking place, so who’s left holding the bag? It’s workers, who have been cast aside, left to the unfortunate poor reception by the WSIB.

What I see as the significance of this announcement about giving all this money back to businesses is that it is a pre-election gift to employers, no matter their safety records. It is a kick in the teeth to injured workers. Instead of restoring decades of cuts to injured workers, the Conservatives are handing \$2.5 billion to some of the very employers who have left workers injured, ill and poor.

What would we do differently? We would be restoring benefits to injured workers, ending the practice of deeming, overhauling the adjudication process. The WSIB engages in claims suppression and denies a large number of claims, particularly for those with long-term injuries. Almost 85% of claim denials are overturned in whole or in part at the worker’s safety insurance tribunal. Think about that for a minute. You’ve got workers who go, they make their claim, and the answer is no—as the member from Sudbury was saying, “No, no, no,” the favourite answer from the WSIB. Then they have to appeal, but they’re sick. They’re trying to get doctors’ appointments. Do they have a doctor? Maybe, maybe not. And in the meantime, they have no income, nothing. But if they’re lucky enough to hold up long enough to get an appeal, 85% of those claims get overturned.

1510

Why is that happening? That tells me there’s some kind of quota going on at the front end that is denying workers what they should be getting, and that’s where the surplus is coming from. The surplus is coming from denying what workers need in order to survive. The result is that workers are forced to undertake long, emotionally and physically draining appeal processes with no financial supports in the meantime.

I think there are other things that we would also like to change. We have in fact championed many real reforms to benefit workers, all rejected by the Ford government, including: 10 days’ paid leave, which is not the same as the establishment of the long-term leave for serious illness which is in this bill; anti-scab legislation; again, an end to the practice of deeming; properly classing app-based—that’s the gig economy—workers as employees; equal pay legislation and enforcement of workplace law violations, including severe penalties for unsafe work conditions that lead to death—in other words, kill a worker, go to jail, along with many others.

I asked the Minister of Economic Development whether this is the cost of doing business in Ontario: undercutting injured workers, casting them aside and then giving money back to employers—just before an election—that actually should be in the pockets of those injured workers. It seems like a quid pro quo that really flies in the face of doing anything for workers at all, because as I said, anyone who is working today could easily be an injured worker tomorrow.

I also want to touch on the wildland firefighter issue. We know that words in bills, words that are there, if they’re left out when it comes to actually claiming a benefit, chances are, you’re not going to get it. We’ve had some back and forth on this today, but there’s still a great deal of concern. Our researchers have been looking at it, firefighters have been looking at it, and they don’t see the language anywhere in the bill that acknowledges that they’re firefighters. So we’re still waiting for that change of classification that actually defines wildland firefighters as

firefighters. Had that been done, then we wouldn't be so worried about the way it's described in this bill. It's kind of an inference that wildland firefighters are there, but the language is not there, the word is not there.

It looks like the defining six months as a year is being left to regulations. We need to know that it's there, and we need to know it's there because we've been asking now for quite a long time, certainly, explicitly for a year. We did have a commitment from the minister to follow through on these things. We need to be absolutely confident that those things are there. Those wildland firefighters deserve those supports, they deserve the presumptive cancer coverage, they deserve to be paid properly, and unfortunately there's just no basis for trust without the exact wording being in the bill.

One of the things that came up in my conversation with the minister was some dispute about how much exposure wildland firefighters get. We're not going to get into a battle of science over this, but what I would like to recommend is that the ministry hire or bring the association called CROSH. CROSH is a research centre at Laurentian University, specializing in occupational health and safety. Now, the wildland firefighters have been asking for a long time for cluster studies into their exposures, and we know their exposures are extremely intense. It's partially funded by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, and it's based at Laurentian University. Why not immediately ask them to do those studies so that we can know for certain the level of exposure that wildland firefighters are facing?

I also want to take a moment to talk about other workers. Truck drivers are workers too. Do you know what? Three truck drivers were killed in my region last week—killed at work, killed doing their jobs. Why? We know they're not being trained, and we know nobody's inspecting the schools. We know that they're going through DriveTest and we know that DriveTest is owned by the private company Serco, and we know there's corruption in the testing, so we know people are getting licences without the skills to drive these big machines. And then we know that there's nobody staffing the inspection stations.

We also know that these new truck drivers, many of whom are new immigrants and deserve to be protected when they come and start to work here, are pushed into accepting a status that's known as "Driver Inc." What that means is that they're virtually self-employed, and because of that, when they are killed on the job, does their family get anything? No. Are they even eligible for WSIB? No. It's a whole category of workers who we depend on, totally depend on, for the delivery of food and goods across the province, across the country, and those workers have zero protection.

Now, I kind of understand why it's a scary issue for the Minister of Transportation, because a lot of those companies are concentrated in his riding, so if he complains about those companies, will he get re-elected, will he get donations? The reality is those workers live there as well. They don't have the money to make donations. Surely their lives are worth protecting. As I say, three were killed this week alone. There's another transport truck about half an hour from my home that has been on fire. There are dozens of trucks in the ditch. And the snow only just came this weekend, so all of those accidents preceded the snow coming.

There are things that this government could do immediately, and part of it is because there are so many other categories of workers that they don't seem to care about. What about the transportation enforcement officers? Can't hire enough. You know why? They don't stay. The pay isn't good enough; it's a very dangerous job. Conservation officers: can't keep them because they won't reclassify. They were told 12 years ago reclassification was coming. It's never coming. Then we've got the wildland firefighters. You can't keep them in the jobs because it's a hard job. They're not being paid well. They're not being respected. Paramedics, same story—can't keep them in the job.

I don't know if people know it costs \$165,000 to train a traffic enforcement officer, but they make about \$20,000 or \$30,000 less than other inspectors working for the Ministry of Labour, so why would they stay? They get trained up, they're now in line, and they move over and get better pay. So they can't keep transportation enforcement officers in place. We know that Ontario is short 50% of the needed enforcement officers.

So the government has spent \$31 million to build this state-of-the-art inspection station in Shuniah, but there's no staff. It's almost never open. We've seen a bar graph of how often that station is open, and it's a little teensy, teensy couple of hours here, couple of hours there. They can't get permanent staff. And what the truckers do—because who wants to be inspected? You don't, because it's going to take time. But you need to be. They stay at the restaurant just down the road until somebody says, "It's okay. They've gone now." So those inspections are not taking place.

What I want to say is, at the very least, fill those positions, pay those workers properly so that it is not a problem having those jobs filled. Frankly, as I said, the very least this government could do would be to make sure that those inspection stations are staffed. If they don't have the courage to address the issue at its source where workers are

simply being exploited and told, “Here’s your key, here’s your licence, off you go. The truck is automatic. You can watch TV while you’re in there, even while driving. Don’t worry about it”—until they’re dead, until they’ve killed somebody else. It’s happening a lot.

1520

I’m not the first to raise this. We’ve raised it again and again and again, and all we ever hear back from the Minister of Transportation is, “We have the safest highways in North America.” I would like, for once, to see them drive that highway. And we’ve seen the Premier, the Minister of Transportation and sometimes the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan up in Greenstone. Well, that’s not an easy drive to go to Greenstone. Do you know why they don’t know what’s going on? Because they’re flying. They’re taking a jet up to the Greenstone mine, they do their announcement and then they fly back. So they don’t have to deal with the highway at all, but we do. The rest of us who live there have to drive that highway, and it’s not safe. I’ve repeated it so many times. It is not safe. There are no shoulders; there are only half-shoulders. They’re coming along in these trucks, they’re in a hurry because they’re under pressure to meet their deadlines. And now we’ve got snow and ice on the roads, and it’s just going to get worse and worse and worse, and frankly, we’re all workers. All the people—the parents, the drivers of the trucks—they’re workers. How come their lives don’t matter? How come they’re not included in anything, in any consideration for workers?

I also want to think about other kinds of work. Right now, the focus of this government is pretty much 100% on the trades. Okay, that’s a slice of society. It’s an important slice. We want to make sure that people get training, that people are encouraged to do that. But in every other sphere of life, the entire system is collapsing. Health care is collapsing. Family health teams across the northwest have not received an increase in 10 years. It’s no wonder they can’t keep staff, they can’t keep doctors, they can’t keep nurse practitioners, and we know that part of the reason is because the pay structure for PSWs, for nurses, for nurse practitioners, even sometimes for doctors if you’re in family health care—when you can move into a hospital and get paid a heck of a lot more. But you’re doing essential work. That pay structure needs to be established across the full range. Whether we’re talking home care, long-term care, hospital care, there needs to be a pay grid that actually matches the responsibilities of those workers, and this government is not doing that.

I’m also thinking about universities. Universities are the places where we have the potential to have independent research. But universities are starving, and courses and programs are collapsing. I can tell you about Lakehead University, which is where I was teaching before I was elected. When I first started teaching there around 2011, there were 40 full-time faculty. We had quite a few contract lecturers, but we had a substantial number of full-time faculty. I was just there this week, and they have seven—seven—full-time faculty left. Everybody else is there as a contract lecturer. And let me tell you, I have a PhD; I had lots and lots of experience. Still, you’re paid \$7,500 a course. Sometimes you’re making maybe \$20,000, \$30,000 a year for your job, with your PhD, with your experience. That is what is happening in post-secondary institutions, and it is because of the persistent underfunding of this government. We know why that underfunding is taking place—I actually met some of them this week—the private universities. They want to step in as another place to make money.

And then we have the same thing going on in education, and health care workers, and educational assistants—educational assistants which this government tried to smash with Bill 28 and taking away their charter rights.

So you know we have a government that—we’ve got these bills called “Working for Workers,” which I don’t think work for very many workers. They work for a little slice and throw everybody else under the bus.

We also have institutions of learning where some kind of independent research could be produced. Why does that matter? We have a bill before the House this week that is talking about the burial of the caverns for carbon capture. We heard all about the big corporations who have funded research about this, but they’ve got a financial interest in the outcome. So where do we get other forms of research, other perspectives? Well, I heard already also that at least one member over there does not believe in consulting with anybody who has ever called themselves an environmentalist. So, there’s a very, very narrow amount of knowledge that has already been pre-approved to bring out a very specific result.

What you have is a party that is ideologically bound to a very particular approach to business, to knowledge, to research, to who they will talk to, who they won’t talk to—I imagine they hear lots from the Fraser Institute, the C.D. Howe Institute. We’ve also seen things like long-term care and the profits from that going into, guess who, the former Premier of Ontario profiting from privatizing long-term care. I understand that former Prime Minister Harper

is profiting nicely from his ownership in Circle K. Interesting, eh? Circle K, where we had to spend \$225 million in order to open up alcohol sales a year early.

Imagine what you could do with \$225 million to actually help people, to actually provide employment. Imagine if you weren't taking away money from injured workers and putting that money back into their pockets—it was promised to them, it was promised to them way back in 1998. Yet here we are for the second time: a government that is giving back a surplus that should be going to help those workers, to help those families. It's not just the workers themselves whose lives are shattered by permanent injuries; it's the families.

Frankly, the WSIB, when it was called the Worker's Compensation Board, was intended to be a non-adversarial place where workers would be heard and fairly assessed, where their doctors—their practising, treating doctors—would be listened to and they would get the supports they need without becoming a burden on their families and without becoming a burden on society. But that's exactly the opposite of what happens now.

Those workers also wind up experiencing severe mental distress because they get told, "No, no, no. Your injury isn't real. We don't believe you." What do you do with that? Then you start to internalize that: "Gee, maybe I'm crazy. Am I not?" And yet, you can't move or you're in excruciating pain, and you get nothing but denial. It's a crime; it is very, very cruel, and it shouldn't be happening.

I think I could speak for another couple of minutes. You know, there's one other thing I'd like to say. We've also put forward a motion about heat stress, and that's a very important issue. We know that people have been dying on the job because of heat stress. We know it's even happening in schools and we would very much like to see the government looking seriously at addressing and preventing heat stress.

As I say, supporting injured workers means you're supporting all workers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I thank the members for their contributions. I always like labour bills that this House puts forward because, like the member from Sudbury, I started out in the rebar business. I was a bender and a crane operator. I don't want to go back and look at the projects where my rebar was involved, but I just hope they're still standing.

I want to comment—part of this bill is the Skills Development Fund. Over the summer I had a great example. I mentioned it to the minister, how the carpenters' union had been working with the Saugeen Ojibway Nation on a Skills Development Fund project. It was a great example of how some of the labour legislation and initiatives that we've been putting forward as government have been operational.

1530

So with all the elements of this bill—firefighters, etc. etc.—isn't it something that you could see lending your support to, for this bill?

**MPP Jamie West:** I think it's a great question from the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. The Skills Development Fund is a great initiative for certain things. There have been things that have troubled me because money has gone to places and I've tried to trace it to see, did we train some workers or not train them? But I think the system like this, where you're bringing in this case Indigenous workers, but traditionally people who aren't working in that field and gaining those skills, makes a lot of sense.

The bill itself, in general, is supportable, but I have to agree with my colleague. This part about continually giving the overflow, the money back to the employer on the backs of workers not making money—it makes it tough to swallow on it. If there was a reason we wouldn't support it, it would be based on that solely. It's a really bad part of the bill. We believe that workers who are injured should be able to pay their bills at the end of the day and not be negatively affected because the government wants to continually reward employers and not have that money go back to the employees.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I listened to both of my colleagues speak to this bill. I know that they are both passionate about this issue. One of the things that I just want to follow up on is the WSIB funding that's going back to workers, so either one can answer on this.

One of the things I guess I find really hard to accept is the rules and how strict it is for a worker to even qualify for WSIB and the benefits. It's almost like fighting a war for their life, for their family. Sometimes people lose so much just trying to get that funding. And yet here we are, the second time, giving money from WSIB back to the employer when these workers should be benefiting, and it would actually help the economy.

**MPP Jamie West:** This unfunded liability—the thing is, it’s a double-edged sword. What happens is, the unfunded liability is how much money will you need potentially for injured workers? And when the Conservative government—it’s the second time since the Premier was elected this term, but Mike Harris did this in the past as well. What they do is they strip away the amount of money that you have available for workers. Then when workers try to get compensation, they say, “No, no, no, there’s no money. We can’t do it.” When it finally builds up to the point, they reduce the employers’ rates. They give the money back to the employers.

In this case, you only need a clean record, I think, for two years. So if you had a fatality three years ago, you’re going to get some money back, right?

They talk about helping small business. Absolutely, it will, but let’s be honest. The more employees you have—if you’re a Walmart, if you’re a Steel Car, for example, with many employees, you’re going to get more money back than a small business will.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Last week I was at Sheraton College speaking with Elena. Funny thing is she went to school with my son in high school and now she’s becoming a plumber.

You know, women have challenges in the trades for their fitting of PPEs. Would the member opposite support this bill for the safety of women and equality for women in the workforce?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Thank you for the question. It’s kind of, of course, why not?

But what about what’s going on in schools, and the fact that education assistants are having to wear Kevlar to work at school? That’s PPE. We’re not talking about that. We’re not acknowledging, actually, the training and love and hard work that goes into those other areas where people are being abandoned.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I’d like to thank my colleagues for their excellent presentation. My question will be for the Ontario NDP critic for labour. I wanted to ask: This is the sixth iteration of Working for Workers from this Conservative government. But I would like to know, what does it say to workers when \$2.5 billion is going back to employers and, at the very same time, the government and this ministry is not collecting \$60 million in stolen wages?

**MPP Jamie West:** Yes, I think we’ve been clear as New Democrats that if someone stole \$60 million from workers, we would work day and night and push every button to get that money back for the workers. The thing as well with this money going and ignoring injured workers who are on WSIB and not funding them properly—it really is a slap in the face. A while ago, the Premier had said to get off your butts—he used language I can’t say here—and get to work for these people who are living in encampments. Many of those workers are tradespeople. Many of those workers are people who were injured on their jobs who have lost everything. We need an opportunity to get them back into the workplace or to support them with a decent ODSP rate that will allow them to pay their bills like rent and put food on the table and stuff. We absolutely need to take care of these injured workers or else we’re going to have more encampments come up.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

**Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam:** I just want to [inaudible] with my experience either driving in Scarborough or coming here to Queen’s Park. I think we all have seen incidents where construction workers, roadside assistance workers—they’re always risking their lives on the road while they are on the job. I think we have always seen the sign, “Slow down.” We all experience this. This particular bill is definitely expanding safety for those construction workers on the road risking their lives for Ontario. This bill is definitely expanding safety for them.

My simple question is, will the opposition join this PC government to make sure we stand up for those construction workers that we see every day who risk their lives on our roads each and every day.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Response? The member for Sudbury.

**MPP Jamie West:** Thank you very much. I think that’s a very supportable side. In fact, I noticed recently when emergency services are travelling, I’ll pull over and people will honk at me like I’m blocking their way. We need to educate people about the importance of this. The minister and I were just recently talking about how it used to be mandatory to have coroner reviews when people on construction sites were killed and how we do address this so we’re reducing the number of injuries that are happening for construction workers, because it isn’t just being hit by a car—sometimes they’re being injured in other ways and killed in other ways. We have to make sure that we’re



looking at how it happened and making recommendations to eliminate that from happening in the future so that workers who are dying aren't dying in vain and having the same thing happen to other works in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** From what I understand, this is the sixth or seventh iteration of "Working for Workers" put forth by this government. What I'm hearing from a lot of skilled tradespersons is affordable childcare would really be something that could help level the playing field. We've got some single parents—and also some single dads, actually, I spoke with—who could really do with \$10-a-day childcare because apparently a lot of the sites open, I learned, at 5 or 5:30 in the morning and many of the daycares are open a little later.

We're just wondering what the government thinks about truly supporting all workers in Ontario by ensuring that they could actually afford childcare.

**MPP Jamie West:** The thing about affordable childcare is it keeps people out of the workforce when it doesn't exist and it causes a lot of stress on families, and primarily it's overwhelming the moms that stay home—overwhelming the moms. It's very unfair to people to not be able to return to work and also to not have a place that they feel their kids will be safe at. We need to implement this. It's been happening forever in Quebec. Childcare should be something we're really looking into and we care about so we can get people back to work and we know that their kids are going to be safe.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I am sharing my time with my colleague the member from Mississauga–Malton.

1540

Mr. Deepak Anand: The best riding.

**Mr. Sheref Sabawy:** The best riding, yes.

Madam Speaker, I rise in the chamber to speak on an issue that goes to the heart of what it means to govern with compassion and purpose. I am here to talk about the safety and well-being of workers across Ontario.

As a new grad or a new immigrant, or when starting a new family, the first concern is a job. The first concern is work, a career. As an immigrant who was new to the workforce, maybe I just got my first professional job in Canada as a new Canadian, responsible for my family—in a majority of the cases for immigrants, it's one-income families; there's one person responsible for the well-being of the whole family. We could think about this bill as the security of the job. This is not the truth. The bill is about the security of the family—the impact of this change on the family and the vulnerable newcomer, the newly added member of the family.

I'm supporting the Working for Workers Six Act because this bill is not just about policy; it's about people, families and the dignity they deserve in times of need. Our government has heard from workers across this province. We heard from parents, adoptive parents, parents through surrogacy and intended parents who have told us about the challenges they face balancing the immense joy of welcoming a child with the fear of losing their jobs. These Ontarians are building families through love and sacrifice, and it's our duty to ensure that they are supported, not penalized during one of the most significant moments of their lives.

That's why Working for Workers 6 proposes to introduce job-protected leave for parents through adoption and surrogacy. For far too long, these parents have been left behind by legislation that did not recognize their unique needs and situations. If passed, this bill will change that. It ensures that adoptive and surrogacy parents will no longer have to make the impossible choice between their new child and keeping their livelihoods intact.

This is about fairness. It's about modernizing our labour laws to reflect the diverse realities of today's families. But supporting workers goes beyond just families. It's about standing with Ontarians in their moment of greatest vulnerability. Right now, when workers fall seriously ill, they often face a ticking clock: their job security versus the time it takes to recover.

Our government is stepping up to align the Employment Standards Act leave for long-term illness with the federal EI sickness benefits, extending it to 27 weeks. This means workers facing debilitating illness will have the time they need to heal, to focus on their health without the looming fear of losing their job or returning early to a job when that will be compromising their safety and their colleague workers' safety as well.

This is not just a policy; this is compassion in action. These proposed changes ensure that no worker in Ontario is left behind in their time of need. We are telling workers, "Your government sees you, we hear you and we are working for you."

Speaker, this bill reflects what it means to put workers first. It's about protecting their safety, their well-being, their families and their at-work colleagues' safety and well-being as well. It's yet another example of how this government is leading with purpose and principle, ensuring that Ontario remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

I would like to talk about personal experience. When I first arrived, I was looking for my profession, going back to my career with all the challenges any immigrant faces to get his first new job, with no Canadian experience, with no references here in the country which I can give as references in interviews.

The minute I managed to get into my professional career, the first job I got, I would have to think twice—twice—for anything that could jeopardize that job. If there is a limitation around illness and I am sick, I might have to try to get back to work as soon as I can so that I don't lose that opportunity. Even if I don't feel really well, even if the doctor is telling me, "You shouldn't," the safety of my job and safety of my family income, to be able to sustain and continue my career, would be an aspect of what will decide when I would come back.

Aligning that with the federal EI laws actually allows all the workers across Canada, not only in Ontario but in all different provinces, to be on the same level. It's fair for workers and it's fair for employers, because not all employers are good players. Some employers might take advantage and try to get rid of some of their workers. This alignment will allow workers to go, take care of their families, take their time off if they have to take care of their health or they have an illness, heal properly, get ready to go back to work without any fear of losing your job and without any fear of jeopardizing their family's security.

I'm very happy to support Working for Workers 6. I'm very proud of the whole series of Working for Workers, since Working for Workers 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and 5. Each one of them addressed some shortage, gap, area in the workspace, which allow employees to experience their best and also for employers to be able to have a standard they go with.

Working for Workers 1 eliminated the two years of Canadian experience from the credentials system, which opened the door for millions, maybe tens of millions of newcomers who arrived in this country at some point in time, having the unfairness in hiring because of the two years of Canadian experience missing. There could be a good engineer who has 15 years of experience, but when he comes and starts looking for a job, he is faced by the two years of Canadian experience, which eliminates him from getting into the workforce. The majority of the time, he might have to accept even a supervisor in a location or site to be able to get registered to be a P.Eng. I think this talks highly about what this government is doing.

Last summer, I attended a graduation for P.Eng. and the chapter of Mississauga president was saying that 60% of the newly graduating P.Eng. today didn't have the two years of Canadian experience and only could become the P.Eng. this time because of the changes this government did and that this man was advocating for. I was so proud as an immigrant; I was so proud as part of this government to make sure that the new immigrants who are arriving here with high skills, with a high number of years of experience, with very good education, advanced education, would get the opportunity to start their job in Canada, start their life in Canada and start meeting the needs of their families and starting kicking off the Canadian dream.

I would like to hand the rest of my time to my colleague.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Mississauga–Malton.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** It's always a pleasure, especially when we're talking about the small businesses, we're talking about the job creators, we're talking about the workers of this province. Why? Because Ontario thrives because of its resilience and the dedication of Ontarians, strengthening businesses, supporting families, ensuring essential services remain accessible to everyone. It is this spirit of hard work and determination that fuels our province's success.

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On behalf of our caucus, on behalf of Premier Ford, we cannot thank our health care workers, educators, manufacturers, tradespeople and the service industry profession enough for being the driving force for our province's growth, innovation and prosperity. We see the results today: increasing \$150 billion to \$205 billion in revenue, over 850,000 people working. All that data is not just a number, it is the hard work and the dedication of the people and the workers of this province, and we can't thank them enough. Their expertise and commitment are the backbone of vibrant communities like mine, Mississauga–Malton, where families and job creators benefit from their contributions.

As we work to build a stronger and more inclusive economy, our responsibility is clear: to recognize, support and uplift our workers. This means providing fair wages, fostering safe working environments and creating opportunities for skill development that help Ontarians adapt to the demands of an ever-evolving economy. That is exactly what the Working for Workers bills are doing.

I want to take a moment and thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development for all the hard work, along with you, as the PA. I always say this is not one ministry, it's many ministries in one, and what we see today, the relationships and the workers doing well, it is not just a coincidence, it's the hard work of everyone working together, and I always say when we work together, we collaborate together, we are better together.

One of the most transformative things that we've done is investing \$1.5 billion in the SDF, the Skills Development Fund. And it's not just the money, it is saying—it's a progressive cycle. People need jobs; jobs need people. What are we trying to do through this? We're trying to fix the gap in between by providing the skill set required for those people to do that job. People like Ontarians, people like—I see uncles-ji and aunties-ji sitting right there from Peel region who have come here. It's many of their family members who are going to be benefiting from this. Their grandkids are going to be benefiting from this. Who are they? They are the Ontarians building this Ontario. So I want to welcome all of you who are here.

So what are we doing here, Madam Speaker? Just to give a small example, a little taste, because I don't have much time: Through this legislation, we're proposing eliminating the \$150 certificate of qualification exam fee for apprentices on their first attempt. It's not just \$150; what it is is basically saying if somebody's looking to get into an apprenticeship, and if they have a financial hardship, and if they cannot afford \$150, they'll not be able to apply. If they cannot apply, they will not be able to become an apprentice; if they can't become an apprentice, they're not going to go into the skilled trades; if they're not going to go into the skilled trades, they're not going to start working. We are breaking that cycle. I'm going to say thank you again to the minister. This is being thoughtful, building a progressive cycle. When we will eliminate this exam fee, by removing this hurdle, we empower apprentices to build a career and strengthen our skilled trades workforce. This government understands that when businesses, the job creators, succeed, so do workers and the community.

I'll give you another example, Madam Speaker, of what we're doing through this bill: reducing the average WSIB premium rate for safe employers to \$1.25, which is the lowest rate in the last 50 years. While other governments had a choice, this is the government that's taking bold steps and making sure the job creators are supported.

We're giving job creators more resources to invest. For an example, a small construction company, HKC, Helen and Kosta construction, in the riding of Mississauga–Malton with about 50 employees, could save as much as \$46,000 from this WSIB surplus rebate. When they get this money, they can put that money back into their employees, improving health and safety, and might well add one more employee, creating another job so that they can actually go out and maybe bid for more of the opportunities and projects. By getting more opportunities, they might be able to employ more people—again, a very progressive cycle. This is exactly what this government is doing through this bill. When businesses reinvest, everyone benefits, more jobs are created, wages are strengthened and our communities gain greater economic stability.

Working for Workers 6 also is emphasizing the importance of workplace safety. Through the safe business incentive program, companies across Ontario, including in Mississauga–Malton, will be rewarded for prioritizing the well-being of their workers. Again, the idea is very simple: When the government is going to provide \$1,000 for every new health and safety action plan, we're not just reducing the cost for employers; we're building a culture of prevention and fostering safer workplaces.

While others may speak of affordability, our government is delivering meaningful, decisive action. Bill 229 reflects an unwavering commitment to real results. What are we doing here in this? We're cutting costs for workers. We're empowering job creators. While we're doing this, we're creating opportunities for all.

When the ministry does all this, they didn't just do it in a silo. I always say, if you have a great, good idea, bring it to your MPP. Your MPP can take it to the ministry.

Through the consultation—I'll give you some of the partners the ministry has consulted with: Ontario Road Builders' Association, Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, Fire Fighters Association of Ontario, Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, Canadian Cancer Society, Newcomer Women's Services and many more.

When we did all this, what it resulted in—Madam Speaker, some of the quotes I would like to share with you. For an example, Marc, business manager of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, said the council appreciates “the progressive steps forward announced today to improve the lives of working people.”

Another example, Daniel Tisch, president and CEO, Ontario Chamber of Commerce: “The Ontario Chamber” of Commerce “shares the government’s focus on lowering the cost of doing business, removing barriers to employment and rewarding organizations that create the safe, healthy environments for their people.”

Madam Speaker, Bill 229 is more than just a collection of updates. It’s the vision of Ontario’s future by protecting our workers. If passed, the legislation and the related regulatory changes we’re proposing will support the safety and well-being of workers and their families; crack down on immigration scams and bad actors; reduce service duration for kidney cancer and remove the age limit for firefighters’ cancer diagnosis; keep costs low for workers and businesses; honour workers by celebrating the contributions and accomplishments of skilled workers of the past, present and future; growing Ontario’s workforce.

Some of the additional supports include expanding PPE protection for women; minimum fines for the corporation; increasing the fines for the corporation; new job-protected leave for adoptive and surrogacy parents; cleaner washrooms to increase accountability and transparency; better training and jobs to improve training, jobs and paycheques—building on previous actions to support millions of Ontarians.

The legislation is a key step to building a stronger, more sustainable and prosperous Ontario, one that benefits every community, including Mississauga–Malton. For Ontarians, this bill represents progress, security and hope. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we’re making sure we are building a better, stronger, progressive Ontario.

So I urge all the members to support this vital piece of legislation, ensuring that Ontario remains a great place to live and work.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I beg to inform the House that the Clerk has received a submission related to Bill Pr55, An Act respecting Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries. Pursuant to standing order 93(a), the submission stands referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Questions?

1600

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I want to comment on the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills, who said that this is a very compassionate bill. I would argue that it’s a very selective compassionate bill in the fact that you’ve left out wildland firefighters and are not considering them to be full-fledged firefighters. In fact, in April the province said it would give wildland firefighters the same cancer, heart and post-traumatic stress disorder coverage as municipal firefighters and expand presumptive coverage.

And then this is what the firefighters are saying: “This government intentionally excluded wildland firefighters from inclusion into the WSIB presumptive coverage for heart conditions, cancer and other chronic diseases. This was very cleverly done by including a new definition for wildland firefighters under subsection 14.1 of the act.”

How can you say that this is a compassionate piece of legislation when you are intentionally leaving out wildland firefighters from the act?

**Mr. Sheref Sabawy:** I respect the question from the colleague opposite, but especially wildland firefighters, I don’t think there is any distinguishing between this and that. This is not true. The old fire workers—we already have been since day one supporting our firefighters—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Just to remind the member to watch the language.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

Since day one we have been supporting our firefighters, and actually firefighters specifically have been getting some specific conditions in regard to long-term and short-term illnesses to make sure that they are protected as the rest of the workers in Ontario, even if they serve for a shorter period of time.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

**Mr. Tyler Allsopp:** Thank you to both the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills and Mississauga–Malton for their presentations on Working for Workers Six.

As a former small business owner, I’ve heard from many business owners and apprentices in my riding about the financial challenges they face, especially as they start their careers and try to build their businesses. These groups have expressed how even small savings can make a big difference.

How does this bill lower costs for apprentices and businesses, and what impact will these changes have on Ontario's economy?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the new member here. Actually, you're not the only one. The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore had a similar concern, and she was asking the same thing too.

What we're doing through this Working for Workers Six package is, if passed, we'll waive the \$150 exam fees for apprentices for taking their initial certification of qualification, eliminating financial barriers and making it easier for the workers to achieve their certification. It's not just removing the cost. It is basically giving them an opportunity. Say, for example, if somebody doesn't have that \$150, think about that situation. They will not be able to apply. If they will not be able to apply, they will not get the apprenticeship. If they're not going to get the apprenticeship, they're not going to get the skilled labour. We're removing that barrier, changing that path and making sure that they're ready to serve the communities.

Again, thank you to the member for that wonderful question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Mississauga–Malton for your presentation—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Erin Mills.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Erin Mills. Thank you; I apologize for that.

I have a question around outstanding fines and what the government is looking at doing to address outstanding fines. There are over \$104.3 million in outstanding Ontario health and safety act fines, which means a company has been fined for having an unsafe workplace, yet the government hasn't come in to collect, which sends a message to the company that they can continue to have unsafe workplaces.

What is your government's plan to collect on these unpaid fines?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: As much as I, of course, respect the point of the discussion here about the fines and the outstanding amounts and stuff, I don't think this is covered as part of this bill, so I would stay within the discussion of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions? I recognize the member for Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Mr. Steve Clark: The great state of Etobicoke.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It is the great state of Etobicoke. Thank you, Speaker, for the question.

I thank my colleagues and the minister for the debate today. It's been really interesting. We talk about labour and how important it is in our communities. I often have the opportunity to speak to many people at events in my riding, and a lot of them are internationally trained professionals. Sometimes, they're frustrated and they're trying to obtain their recognition. They come to the great state of Etobicoke or Ontario or Canada, and they just want recognition for their qualifications and we're leaving their skills underutilized. We need these workers. We need them in the workforce, but it causes stress for them and their families. They just want to get to work. They want to get a paycheque and bring presents home and have presents under the Christmas tree, just like everybody else.

I'm wondering how will this bill address these delays and ensure that Ontario benefits from the expertise more quickly.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. You really touched my heart. I talked about it earlier as well: Today is the day when my dad passed away five years back. I do remember when I was in grade 12, we were having a conversation and he said he wanted to become an engineer, and he couldn't because he was a refugee from Pakistan in 1947. So he wanted me to live his dream. I actually ended up doing my undergrad in chemical engineering.

But when I came to Canada, the first thing I was told was, "Oh, engineering is only for those who are professional engineers," so I could not work in my field. I had a choice: Should I take care of my nine-month-old child or get into the education? Madam Speaker, I took care of my child first.

But what are we doing through this bill? No more 2000-01; we are in 2024. We have Premier Ford as our leader. We're making sure we're cutting the decision-making timeline in half, reducing registration wait times for internationally trained professionals from six months to three months, so you do not have to pick between food—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further questions?

MPP Jill Andrew: I've got a couple of questions for the government. I'm wondering where 10 paid days for sick days, where that is in the legislation for workers. I'm also wondering, in this Working for Workers edition 6 bill, where the anti-scab legislation is in this bill. Because I don't see it there, and these are two things that could really support workers.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member for that question. If passed, this bill will introduce 16-week job-protected leave under the Employment Standards Act for adoptive and surrogacy parents. We're making sure that for workers that need the support, we're here to help them. Another example is workers with a serious medical condition can get federal EI benefits, which is why our proposal is for 27 weeks to align with the federal government's system. This would be one of the longest job-protected leaves in the country. We're also unlocking \$400 million in workers health and safety programs through the Workplace Safety Insurance Board to support injury prevention, mental health and worker recovery.

This is a government who believes in working for workers—to make sure we appreciate, we thank them for what they've done. That is the reason we're a thriving economy in Ontario, and we'll continue to work for our workers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I am really happy to see how skilled trade labourers are very proud of what they are contributing to the economy for Ontario, but sometimes they are really frustrated that they are not recognized as much. I would like to see how that Skilled Trades Week and why is it so important to encourage them.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I would like to say thank you to the member, but before—I do not have much time, so I quickly want to say, actually, thank you to the member from Scarborough Centre for all his advocacy. Thank God, we have a week to appreciate our skilled workforce. Thank you for all your hard work.

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As I said earlier, this is a government that believes in progressing the whole province together collaboratively, and we'll continue to work together with our workers.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It's an honour for me to rise today to talk to the sixth iteration of Working for Workers.

I think we can all recognize that almost everyone here in Ontario is a worker. I think back to my history; from the age of about nine or 10 years old, I have worked. I have always had a paper route, worked in restaurants, worked in retail, worked in the service industry. We are always, all of us, having to work at some point. In fact, all of us here today are doing another mode of work.

I had the opportunity to participate in the committee hearings during Working for Workers Five, at which point we heard many concerns that were brought forward to us by Parkdale Community Legal Services as well as the Workers' Action Centre.

When I first heard that we were going to be looking at yet another Working for Workers bill—in fact, Working for Workers Six, this time—I was quite pleased. I thought, "Perfect. Here will be the things that have been missing in all of the numerous iterations of this bill—all of the recommendations that we heard at committee that didn't make it into Working for Workers Five, four, three, two, or one, for that matter."

However, while I will say Working for Workers Six does have some important provisions within it, there still is quite a bit missing. Something that is top of mind and something that I brought again and again to this chamber is the need for wage parity, the tremendous disparity that health care workers face across the province of Ontario—and that is down to this government. There is a scale of pay, regardless of the job that you do, depending upon the different domain of health care in which you find yourself, such that individuals who are a PSW or a nurse within the home and community care sector are paid the lowest. They might enjoy their job. They might be excellent at their job. They might be doing what they're motivated by and where they would like to stay. However, given the cost-of-living crisis, they can't stay, because it is such a burden for them when their pay is so low. So they will move from the home and community care sector into the long-term-care sector, which pays marginally higher. After training up within that sector, and despite the fact that they might enjoy the work there—the next best level is the acute-care sector; it's the gold standard. Why is it that despite doing a PSW's job, a nurse's job, a dietitian's job, there is this gradient of unequal pay? That's a system of inequality that we've allowed to persist here in Ontario, and that's something that is not addressed with Working for Workers Six.

I am not certain, as well, that there has been consultation with workers in the creation of this bill. I don't believe that the OFL, the largest organization that represents workers, was contacted for this bill. If indeed I am wrong, I'm happy for the government to show me the receipts and indicate that I am indeed wrong.

I think back, as well, in my thoughts about wage parity, about community mental health workers, some of the people who are working with folks who are struggling on the most significant, profound human levels on our streets, who are providing those relationships, getting people to supports, getting people to services—who have really found a difficult time being homeless and struggling with their mental health. What is disturbing to me is that those dedicated, wonderful, caring people in that sector are often standing in the same line at the food bank with the clients they serve. And why is that? Why is that, in a province as rich as Ontario, that people who are providing that tremendous, caring service are doing so at a significant fiscal cost to themselves? That's something we could fix and yet is not fixed in Working for Workers Six.

I think as well about the wonderful people who are working in non-profits across the province. Non-profits have stepped in to address the gaps that have been created by gaps in government policy and gaps in government attention, and yet, in that sector, they are there by the grace of their good hearts. They're certainly not well paid and they're certainly not given enough respect by this government. Providing them with respect would be to pay them far better and also to provide year-over-year budget allocations rather than having them chasing grants again and again and again. It's a situation that the government could fix.

I think as well to my area of London North Centre, and I think of the Thames Valley District School Board as well as the London District Catholic School Board. As it turns out, educational assistants have a tremendous depth of knowledge and a breadth of knowledge, and such care and advocacy and concern for the students that they serve, yet these educational assistants in the Thames Valley District School Board earn \$5 less per hour than the same job in the London District Catholic School Board. That's something the government could address immediately with a one-time payment, and yet does not.

I must also mention that this government is not funding education properly in terms of the statutory benefit increases for CPP and EI. They're expecting the school board in London to pick up that cost, which is also wrong, considering that is legally mandated.

Physicians who are working in family health teams are working in funding arrangements that have not been updated since, I believe, 2017. That is the model of care that the province wants to promote. It is a wonderful model of care where you have team-based care, where people are able to provide all the different care that we need for all the different dynamics of our health. But why are they promoting a system that still has an outdated funding model? It makes no sense.

What is also missing from this bill is what advocates have been calling for and the official opposition NDP has been calling for, for a number of years, which is 10 employer-paid sick days. This bill, Working for Workers Six, does establish a long-term leave for serious illness, but that is not the same. We're talking about sickness, we're talking about reducing the risk and we're talking about not spreading infection through our communities after the COVID-19 pandemic, and yet this government seems ideologically opposed to preventing risk for people in our community.

What's also missing from this legislation, Speaker, is something that workers have been calling upon for decades, ever since a Conservative government removed it from legislation, which is anti-scab legislation. You cannot have a government that pats itself on the back for supporting workers and still allows the use of scab labour. Scab labour undermines the work that everyone does. It allows contract negotiations to go on for weeks, sometimes months—or, in the case of ACTRA, it will go on for years; 1,000 days, I believe, is going to be the anniversary that is coming up, according to our critic for labour, the MPP from Sudbury.

Also, the use of scab labour is something that benefits employers. In my community, at Western University, the workers there from CUPE had to walk off the job because they were not being paid fairly, according to their labour. They were not being paid the same as workers in the London District Catholic School Board, Fanshawe College and Thames Valley District School Board, so they had to withdraw their labour. But because there is no anti-scab legislation in Ontario, the employer sought to use these fly-by-night scab labourers to really put the pressure on workers, to take the power away from workers and to try to make them accept a deal that was less than what they deserve.

Workers from CUPE stayed strong. They did not break, despite not having support from this government, and they ended up getting an agreement, and congratulations to them for that.

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What's also missing from this legislation—and it's such a surprise because this government has known about this for years, which is the practice of deeming, determining that injured workers are able to work jobs that they don't actually have. The WSIB was set up to protect workers, to advocate for workers, and to make sure when they became sick or injured as a result of the work that they performed, that they would have supports. And yet the WSIB is, for the majority of the time, saying no to workers; is, in fact, in the business of denying people the supports that they have paid in to.

With this government we're seeing money given back from WSIB to employers, and at the same time, this government is not collecting on stolen wages. This is a very curious situation which doesn't make sense on the face of it. How is it that this government is giving money back to employers, and there are employers who are stealing from their workers? How can that happen at the exact same time? It makes very little sense.

We could also have equal pay legislation, something that is missing from this. We don't see that within this bill. I had thought, when I saw Working for Workers 6, okay, we're going to clean up all the loose ends; we're going to finally address all of the issues that have been missing. And yet, unfortunately, we're not.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the workers who have had money stolen from them. As we head in toward the holiday season, when we're living in a cost-of-living crisis, \$60 million is owed to people who've worked for that, who've laboured for that, who have toiled for that, and this government has not done the right thing and made sure that those workers got the money that they have so rightfully earned.

This is money that has been between 2017-18 and July 2024. It's also been shown that since 2017-18, on average, under a third of money that has been stolen from workers has actually been paid. That's not even a passing grade; that's not even 50% or 51%—30%, under a third.

From the Workers Action Centre, Deena Ladd says that the system is broken in Ontario. While this government has promised tougher penalties under the ESA for those who violate it, when is this going to be enforced? Clearly, employers have found that they know that the government will not enforce stolen wages, so they are free and fit to continue this wage theft from their employees because they know the province—there's a high chance that they won't ever be discovered, and even if there are orders issued, they won't actually have to pay.

In fact, Ladd says that the numbers that we see could just be the tip of the iceberg. I'd like to quote Ladd, who said, "Many of the workers that we work with don't even file complaints because they just don't see the point," and I've got to say, I agree. When only 30% of these are recovered, it's no wonder workers don't have faith in this ministry or enforcement to make sure that they get back their money.

What is also missing is that when a worker makes a complaint of this nature, of wage theft, why does that not trigger a broader investigation under the ESA? If an employer has done this once, the likelihood is so incredibly high that they've done this to numerous other employees. It shouldn't just be a single complaint-based system.

What's also to mention is that there's very little deterrent for these individuals. We see these increased fines, but if they're never levied, that's not a deterrent whatsoever. An employment and immigration lawyer, Sharaf Sultan, has said, "Unfortunately, I think there is an understanding out there that the ministry is not as hard as they should be and you can delay [paying wages] with little to no consequence." While the maximum fines have been increased, we can see the ministry is not doing the job.

I'd also like to quote one of the ministry's spokespeople who said, "If employers don't pay their orders letters are issued" with "follow-up calls." And, "If there is still non-compliance, the ministry can register and enforce warrants of seizure and sale, put liens on property and garnish bank accounts," but we don't see that happening. We see legislation that is titled "Working for Workers," but why is this not happening? Why is there still \$60 million owed to workers in the province and the ministry not standing up and fighting for them?

When we consider the WSIB—when the WSIB does not support workers who become sick or become injured, not only does it destroy lives, but they end up on social assistance and that cost is far greater.

I want to say that a 2015 study was conducted at McMaster and Trent Universities. It found that 46% were living on the poverty line a mere five years after their accident. This cost is borne by all of us. Despite the fact they have worked, they've worked hard and whether it's through their own fault or through a situation at work, they became injured. They became exposed to a chemical. Instead of receiving the supports that they're guaranteed, no, they end up being a cost on the system, and what a terrible thing. Nobody goes to work hoping to become injured, hoping to become ill. They should have a province that has their back through the WSIB.

Last but not least, I also want to, first, also look and consider the multiple intersections of identity, how many of the folks who are in low-wage and precarious jobs can become ill, and this includes both mental and physical illness. This leads to such financial hardship. Lives can come crashing down from them when they're sick or when they're injured, and many workers are forced to go to work sick because they don't have access to this short-term paid sick leave. So not only are they going to work because they don't have that protection, but they can often make themselves yet more ill because these things are missing.

I notice my time is starting to run out. I was hoping when I first saw that we were addressing Working for Workers 6 that we would have a chance to tie up all of these loose ends, to listen to workers' organizations who have presented at committee, who have brought up strong concerns about things that are missing, and then we see those pieces have not been addressed. Whether it's wage parity, whether it's making sure that folks who are working aren't having to visit food banks along with the people they serve and making sure that there's fairness, fairness across sectors, fairness across systems.

There are things in this bill that are supportable, but I did want to lastly point out a concern that's very curious. The government has said and made very bold claims about their support for wildland firefighters, and there's nothing in this bill that recognizes that a fire season will be considered a year of service. The government has been claiming this will be in regulation, but why isn't it in the bill in the first place? If this is something that you're committed to, if this is something that you recognize, if this is something that you believe in, why is it being left to the regs?

We have these outstanding questions, as do wildland firefighters: Why is it not in the bill? It remains a question for us, and considering that this is the sixth iteration of this bill of Working for Workers, why has it not been included in the bill?

There are many things that still remain outstanding: whether it's 10 days paid sick leave, whether it's anti-scab legislation, whether it's updates to the WSIB, ending the process of deeming and phantom jobs, whether it's properly classing app-based or gig economy jobs, making sure people are paid equally according to the work they do or whether it's actually collecting on the money that is owed to workers. Unfortunately, I gather, Speaker, we'll be seeing a Working for Workers 7 because these pieces, despite being brought up again and again and again, are still yet missing. I have to ask myself, and I have to ask this government, why they remain missing. Why are these curiously absent? It is not from a lack of official opposition advocacy or from people coming to this Legislature. I hope that they'll be addressed, and perhaps they'll be added during the committee process.

1630

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): It's time for the questions.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Women in trades face unique challenges, including a lack of properly fitting PPE. Will the member opposite oppose Working for Workers 6, which ensure safety and equity for women and other under-represented groups in the trades?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Bay of Quinte for the question. I hope that the member listened to my speech quite fully and completely because I was speaking quite a bit about women-dominated professions, in fact, many of which are in the health care sector, many of which are in the education sector. And yet we see these workers being neglected. I think we can all agree that women should be able to go to work with properly fitting PPE, but women should also be able to go to work and be paid not only the same as men but paid the same according to their health care sector. This is something the government could address. One could consider that it is actually misogynistic to not pay women properly and that is something—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's sexist.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: —that has been sexist and ignored for many years: that people in home community care are paid less than long-term care and are paid less than those in acute care. The government could address this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further questions?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I listened to my colleague from London North Centre, and he talked a lot about WSIB and the practice of deeming. One of the things that we recently found out is that the government is actually giving back money to the employers. And when we know a lot of workers—and you mentioned health care workers and women workers who are struggling. And when they have to go into a battle where they're trying to get from WSIB something that they're owed. And yet there are all these restrictions, there are all these ways to undermine workers. Why is it, do you think, that the government is giving back money to the employers when they could actually make it possible for so many of these workers to be treated fairly and get the benefits that they truly deserve?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank my colleague from Scarborough Southwest for an excellent question. The process of deeming in the WSIB has been flawed for many, many years. When a person who has become injured in a workplace is treated by their doctor and their doctor makes recommendations, the WSIB and insurance companies will employ their own paper doctors who never physically see that person, yet in their "wisdom" and "expertise" are able to determine that that person is not as sick as the original treating physician had said. That is wrong.

And at the same time, the government giving all of this money back to employers—some of whom have stolen from their employees—makes very little sense. It's a contradiction. If indeed we had a system where workers were supported fully, where they were getting the treatments that they rightly deserve, where other employers are not stealing from their employees, then and only then could one justify giving money back to employers. But workers are not getting the supports that they require and that they deserve from the WSIB, which almost always says no.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for his comments, and he touched on a number of subjects. What I like about this bill—and it comes on top of so many other measures that we've done for workers. But in this bill itself, there are so many measures: There are measures for supporting families, such as the 16-week job-protected leave; firefighters, as been mentioned before; employment; primary skills; kidney, cancer, 20 years etc.; Skilled Trades Week; waving of exam fees; Ontario immigrant nomination program; cracking down on fraudulent representatives, etc.; and protections for women.

I just look at the comprehensiveness of the bill and it touching on so many measures. I'm wondering if that would be enough to have the member support the bill.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for the question. I'm not going to stand here in my place and say that everything in this bill is bad and wrong and a mistake—absolutely not. There are things in this bill which are entirely supportable. But what I have tried to say throughout my comments is how much is missing, how many things that workers have been asking for for year upon year upon year which are entirely absent from this bill.

I also wanted to point out that I strongly believe that this bill was not informed by the voices of workers. We had the opportunity, during Working for Workers 5, to hear from the Workers Action Centre and Parkdale legal services about things that were missing: making sure that there were proactive inspections under the ESA, making sure that there were also comprehensive inspections when one complaint was made. Unfortunately, we have seen these cuts being made. We have seen a lack of inspections. So we need to see things that are done to support workers, especially ones who are being stolen from, and especially ones who are being denied their rightful supports under WSIB.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the member for London North Centre. Thank you very much for your presentation. One thing that I noticed when I was looking at this bill is it's a piecemeal bill. It tinkers at the edges: There's a little bit here, and a little bit here, and a little bit here. But when we're looking at making working in Ontario the kind of—we want to make it livable, we want to make sure that people can afford a home, they can afford the rent, they can afford a mortgage, they can pay their bills. What kinds of changes would you like to see in bill Working for Workers 7 to help us get to the kind of good working conditions that we need in Ontario?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you to my friend from University-Rosedale for her question. I think what I would like from this government, if they want to truly in word and in action state that they work for workers—I'd like an acknowledgement of the mistake that was made with Bill 124 of taking a women-led profession and making it suffer with a 1% wage increase. I would also like some acknowledgement about Bill 28, with educational assistants, another female-dominated profession that was attacked by this government. There are many things where this government could improve its track record on working for workers, not simply by introducing multiple pieces of legislation that tinker around the edges. We could address wage parity, we could address wage theft and we could address WSIB. Unfortunately, those things are still yet absent. Here's hoping for number 7.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the member for his debate today. The member and I have had many conversations over the years here at Queen's Park, and he'll probably agree with me that we need more doctors here in the province of Ontario. As well, he'll probably agree with me that—I don't know if he remembers when George Smitherman was the Minister of Health; he starved health care, and he got rid of a lot of the spots at the universities

for health care. Yet the member opposite will not support the immigration pathway for self-employed physicians, as we are trying to do with Working for Workers 6.

Why are you standing in the way of the solution to address critical health care labour shortages here in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for a very interesting question. I think maybe the member forgets that it was the official opposition that brought forward a motion to make sure that there was more access for people to family physicians across Ontario. That would be to tackle the administrative backlog that family physicians face. They spend 19 hours per week filling out administrative tasks. Our opposition day motion would actually make sure that two million more people had access to a primary care physician, because that number of people without a family doctor right now is 2.5 million. It's going to grow to 4.4 million in a very short period of time. That was something we could fix right away, and yet the Conservatives, curiously, voted against Ontarians having a family doctor. I can't fathom why they wanted to block that opportunity for physicians to practise their skills with yet more Ontarians.

I also want to point out that I did mention in my remarks the outdated funding model for family health teams that this government is trying to push upon people. They're not paying people fairly. They've got to pay people what they're worth.

#### **Working for Workers Six Act, 2024**

**Resuming the debate** adjourned on November 28, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

**Bill 229**, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters

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

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It's always a pleasure to rise in the House. I want to rise today to speak on Bill 229, the Working for Workers Six Act. Let me be clear about one thing. This government refers to this legislation as Working for Workers Six. Actually, this is the government's eighth workers bill, but the problem is they don't want to talk about the first two workers bills they put forward.

Bill 124: Everybody remembers that. That's when they attacked our nurses, our workers, their collective agreements, and they fought it in court even though they knew it was constitutionally wrong.

Then they brought in a "notwithstanding" clause that attacked childhood educators and child care workers. They attacked the rights of every single worker in this province by invoking the "notwithstanding" clause to interfere in their legal bargaining process, in order to attack workers who, day in and day out, are there for our children and who earn about \$40,000 a year.

They wanted to cap their wages through Bill 124, on nurses, at 1%. Let's remember, Speaker: That happened during a once-in-a-century pandemic when our nurses and our health care workers were working day in, day out, keeping us safe and caring for their patients.

This is what's really interesting about it, when they brought in Bill 124: This was at a time that we were running at 7% or 8% inflation, and our nurses' wages were limited to 1% increases per year, and that included their benefits. They violated their collective agreements, including mental health. Let's keep that in mind when this government talks about working for workers.

While there are elements in this bill that I can and we should support, I believe it's critical to acknowledge what falls short: the comprehensive action that Ontario workers, including our brave firefighters and first responders, need and deserve.

Let me begin by recognizing one positive step in this legislation: the reforms to better support firefighters diagnosed with certain types of cancers. Firefighting is not just a dangerous profession because of the immediate risk posed by fire and smoke; it's also a hazard because of the long-term exposure to cancer-causing chemicals and other harmful substances. The amendments to expand presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters are a victory hard-fought by many, including the firefighters' association, firefighters and, quite frankly, the NDP. This will save lives, provide critical support to families and give firefighters the dignity they deserve.

But we cannot stop here. Bill 79 is a start but it's far from the finish line. Today, I want to speak about the glaring gaps that remain, gaps that continue to put our firefighters and workers across this province at risk.

I'm going to start by a story. I went to the Queenston fire hall on Saturday. They had a fundraiser there. They raised money for charity and they have a breakfast once a month. One of the firefighters, who was a volunteer in Niagara-on-the-Lake, came to me and talked to me about this bill, and said how glad he was that the presumptive language is coming through. Here's his story: In November 2013, a tumour was discovered on his left kidney through an ultrasound and later confirmed with a CAT scan. By January 2014, he underwent treatment to remove his kidney.

At that time, kidney cancer was not recognized as a presumptive occupational illness unless a firefighter had been on the job for 20 years. Think of that for a moment. This was an individual, a young man; he ended up serving 13 to 14 years, putting his health on the line, responding to emergencies, and being exposed to a dangerous substance, but he's told that he hadn't served long enough for his cancer to be considered work-related.

Thankfully, the threshold has since been reduced to 10 years, but his story reminds us of how slow progress can be and how many firefighters have been left behind. I can tell you, in Niagara Falls, we've had lots of our firefighters die early because of cancer-related illnesses. And the union and the association of those firefighters had to fight long and hard to get recognized.

We know how important it is to treat our firefighters and all our first responders with the respect and dignity they deserve. We know that some administrators—and this gets to me, I'm telling you, Mr. Speaker. I know you're listening; you always do. You're one of the better Speakers we've ever had here. I had to make sure I get that out; there's no doubt about that.

We have CEOs across the province of Ontario who want to interfere in the bargaining process when it comes to firefighters. I want to say to those CEOs: Respect your firefighters. Respect what they do every single day. A CEO probably makes—and I'm guessing; I don't know what they make in Toronto. I know that a councillor in Toronto makes more than I do as an MPP. I'm not sure what a CEO would make, but let's say, ballpark, \$250,000. I don't know one CEO that answers the call when the fire alarm goes off and those firefighters run and put their equipment on, run to get into the fire truck, go to the fire—not knowing what's ahead, not worrying about what's ahead—knowing they've got to get there and help their communities.

But here's what's interesting to me. When I look at everybody that's here—I don't care if you're Liberal, Green or Conservative; I know we all support our firefighters and respect our firefighters. But I don't know anybody in this room, just like any CEO, that when the firefighters are running into that fire, we're running in with them. You know what we're doing? We're running out of our House. We're relying on our firefighters to save our property, to save our kids, to save our families.

I say to the CEOs across this province of Ontario: Respect the firefighters. Make sure you bargain with them with a fair collective agreement that takes into consideration the risks that they're performing every single day. This part in this particular bill shows what happens to firefighters. I've been doing this job now for 11 years. I have attended many, many, unfortunately, funerals for firefighters who answered the call and end up losing their lives, leaving at home their families, their spouses, kids and grandkids. They never once said, "I'm not going in there to worry about the chemicals that where there."

I want to be clear: Let's support them. They shouldn't have to always be going to arbitration to get a fair and just collective agreement. I think it's wrong in this province. I wanted to get off my chest because it's always bothered me.

We know firefighters face risks that are different than other jobs. I was an auto worker—most people here, I have told you that story. There were risks in being an auto worker. I worked around chemicals. We lost a lot of our brothers and sisters to cancers. We had to fight with WSIB to be covered. We tried to get presumptive in some of those cancers; unfortunately, we were fought tooth and nail.

Firefighters—because it's in this bill, I want to talk about it. They can develop cancers, like I've already said: kidney cancer and numerous other cancers. But the one that I just found out recently—I'm looking at the Conservatives for this one, because the NDP, the Liberals, the Greens and the independents have voted for my bill to make sure that prostate cancer and the PSA testing to save men's lives—men's lives, because if you've got a prostate, you can get prostate cancer.

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What I found out, as I brought up my bill last time—and I had a press conference right here at Queen's Park. The firefighters supported us, the leader of the Liberals supported us and actually came to the press conference, so did the leader of the Greens, because they know how important it is to get the PSA testing covered by OHIP.



Firefighters, because they're very good at what they do in highlighting the cancers that they're facing every day—I found out when I was out at an event—a woman came to me. She's actually from Guelph. I think I actually was at the Toronto Maple Leafs game. She said, "My husband is a firefighter, and he's got prostate cancer."

So when I went back to my community, I asked the president. I asked Justin, "Do firefighters have a higher rate of getting prostate cancer than the general public, other men?"—like me, the Speaker, my good buddy here from Ottawa—"Do they?" He said, "Yes, they have a 1.41% better chance of getting prostate cancer because of the exposure, and younger."

So I think to myself—and it bothers me, Speaker. I think to myself, if we collectively in this chamber here know that if we get a PSA test and we find out through the PSA test that you have early stages of prostate cancer because you got the test, do you know what happens? I'm looking at the men in this room. I should look at the women too, because, you know, if one of the men dies, it's usually a husband, maybe a grandfather. Do you know what can happen? If you get an early detection of prostate cancer, whether you're a firefighter, whether you're in a skilled trade, whether you're an auto worker, whether you're just a man with a prostate—a 99% success rate that you will live five years longer. But the problem is, if you do not get the test done and you don't get the early detection, your chances of survival go from 99% down to 25%. That's a big dip.

I can't tell you how many people come to me since I've been raising the issue in his House now for over five years and say, "Keep fighting for men. Keep fighting for prostate. Get that test covered." No man deserves to die. How it came about—I don't know if the firefighters are listening or not; it didn't come from the firefighters. Do you know what it came from, Mr. Speaker? It came when I was campaigning in my last—two elections ago. I've been here so many times now I can't keep track of all of the elections. I'm not as good as you yet, but I'm working on it.

I'm knocking on the doors in Fort Erie. Men come to the door. "How are you doing?"—the normal speech that we all do—"I'm the best guy for the job." Do you know what they said? "Do you know what you need to do? You need to fight and get prostate cancer, the PSA testing, covered." He told me the reason why he needed it: He can't afford to get the test. He says, "I barely can pay for food. I can barely pay my rent. They're capping me on ODSP." His life is just as important as my life, and I promised him, when I came to this, I would raise this. I said that I believe that all the parties would come together and get the testing done, and you know what? There's only one party left that continues to deny the testing paid by OHIP: It's the Conservatives.

I'm going to tell you a story. They're not here, but you can ask your colleagues. I've had your colleagues come to me and tell me about stories where their dad has got prostate cancer. They've told me stories where their support staff has got prostate cancer. So I know that it's affected that side of the House, and I'm going to say this, because I'm not talking out of school. I know that the Prime Minister of Canada that just passed away—I'm not going to mention his name—but he just passed away. He had fourth-stage prostate cancer and passed away. And it's happening every single day, colleagues. Every day, a man is dying. And as we're here today, in the province of Ontario, across this country, 13 men will die today of prostate cancer. If we caught those cancers early, they could survive—99%.

I'll tell you about my staff. I have four staff. That's it, just four. I know some of the ministers have four just to drive the car. But I can tell you, out of my staff, three out of the four—dads—have had prostate cancer. Fortunately, none of them have died, but they have gone through the treatment. They have to get checked every year and the process and all that works. So we know it's out there.

I'm begging this labour minister: When we bring amendments for this bill, include the prostate for firefighters. Pass my bill.

I'll give you an example, because I know there are some guys who have been here as long as I have. One member here—I can't remember his riding so I won't say it, but he's a good guy. Why don't you take the bill, name it after yourself, get your party to agree with it and let's get it passed? Because it's that important of a—it's not about credit to me, it's about saving men's lives, about saving grandfathers' lives, it's making sure that their spouses and their partners are taken care of and they can live as long as they can.

I don't want to stay on the prostate one too long, but I had to say that, because there's a way to save lives, a way to save firefighters' lives. I really thank the professional firefighters for raising this issue, because the one thing that firefighters are really good at: People love firefighters. I have never heard anybody say they don't like a firefighter. I've heard it, say, in other professions, like auto workers—nobody loves an auto worker. Nobody's running around saying, "auto workers." But firefighters, police officers, some of those jobs that raise this issue are going to highlight it higher than maybe an auto worker can.

So please, I'm saying to the minister—I've talked to him about it, by the way. I'm not talking out of school. I've raised it with him already. When the amendments come forward, let's put prostate testing, the PSA testing, in here. I'll get off that. I just want to say, as I finish up on the firefighters, thank you for everything you do. Thank you for being there for us, our community. I can't say enough about firefighters. I love firefighters, they know that.

I will tell a quick story, real quick, on firefighters. If it weren't for the firefighters in my community in Niagara Falls, my wife, who was hit by a drunk driver—it was the firefighters that got to the scene first, it was the firefighters that saved my wife's life. And we've always, always—and my wife has always, always—thanked the firefighters. So to the firefighters, thanks for everything you do, because your life can change in a minute and the firefighters are always there for you. The EMS, all the emergency services: Thank you for what you do.

But I want to talk about other stuff on the bill. I'm just checking to see how much time I got left.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Two minutes.

MPP Wayne Gates: Two minutes? Oh, my God. I'm going to talk real quick on what we need to do, what needs to be done if we're going to do Working for Workers 46, 47—whatever number you're going to get to. Here are the things you've got to get done.

You've got to get rid of deeming for injured workers. Our injured workers are living in poverty. That is a disgrace. I go to work to perform a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Through no fault of my own, I get injured on the job; you get deemed and then you're living in poverty. That's wrong in the province of Ontario.

We need 10 days of sick days in the province of Ontario. I'll give you an example. I've been sick for almost two weeks, three weeks here. Do you know what happens when I'm sick? I didn't come in for a day. That killed me because I don't like to miss time. I didn't come in for a day. I wore a mask the rest of the time. Guess what happens? I get paid. I got paid even though I was at home. Everybody in the province of Ontario should have that.

I talked about the PSA testing. I'm going to talk about bike lanes. Do you know what happens when you get rid of bike lanes? It's the workers that are using those bike lanes. The gig worker that brings your meal—they're driving down; they need the bike lanes, because you know what? They're getting hit. If you don't have a bike lane, they're going to get hit. They're workers—that's what they are, they're workers. And you know what? They work extremely hard. But getting rid of a bike lane puts them in jeopardy. And what did you do? You put a bill in to say, well, if they get hit by a car, you can't even sue the government. You can't tell me you care about workers when that's going to happen. So I'm saying, listen, leave the bike lanes, because the workers are getting killed.

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And you know what I think is even interesting? You know how many people drive here, that come here to Queen's Park every day? You see the bike rack out here? People are coming to Queen's Park on their bikes, going down the bike lanes because they know it's safe. I've seen some of the people here that have their small babies—

Interjection: Five seconds.

MPP Wayne Gates: I've got five seconds.

What do they call it? The carriage on the back with their little baby inside—and they drive down the bike lanes because it's safe.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It's now time for questions.

Ms. Laura Smith: I was listening to the member from Niagara Falls intently, and I appreciate the conversation he had around cancers. The Working for Workers Six Act actually is extending job protection for serious illness, including cancer. As a cancer survivor myself, I was pretty happy to hear about the measures that are happening. You don't want to worry about your job or coming back to your job when you're suffering through cancer, and I know this first-hand. The government of Ontario is demonstrating strong leadership by expanding job protection for those with serious illness to 27 weeks.

“We know that cancer doesn't wait—but your job should.” Those aren't my words. Those are Andrea Seale's, the CEO of the cancer society.

I'm just wondering if the member opposite would vote in favour of this, for providing time for those who are suffering with cancer and extending that and allowing them to have a job to go back to after serious illness.



MPP Wayne Gates: I certainly do appreciate the question. I think this is the Working for Workers 6 bill? My understanding is our labour critic and our party have supported every single bill so far. We haven't voted against one.

On your point around saying that if you get cancer and you're off work for six months or whatever it is and going back to your job: I'm saying to you what we should do is make sure that we have sick days. Sick days are what's important. Put sick days in here.

I'll do whatever we can to try and get people to get better when it comes to cancer, but you're asking people to lose 10 days' pay. So the minute they go off—yes, you get your job back, but you have no income. Now you've got to go to the federal program that has sickness under EI—I think it's 21 weeks or 23 weeks—but nothing from the province. They should have 10 paid sick days if that's what happens to them when they get cancer.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: I always like it when our friend from Niagara Falls holds forth, because this is someone who has contributed a lot to the labour movement in this province and in this country—and not just the organized labour movement. I've heard this member on several occasions, as he did just now, make the case for the gig workers, who do not have decent standards of work, to be treated with respect.

I know, as the member said, there is nothing in this bill to make sure that workers delivering food, delivering things people need, are paid for their full shift. In fact, what I've heard you say in the past is that they're only paid for engaged time. As they try to get from point A to point B, as this government is obsessed with ripping out bike lanes in the city of Toronto, they may not make it safely.

So I'm wondering, member, if you could hold forth again on the people being taken advantage of by these dot-com billionaires. Why won't this government stand up and fight for gig workers?

MPP Wayne Gates: The gig worker one is one that—I've really gone over and above on this. I've actually gone on Yonge Street, and I would see 10 or 12 of them lined up in front of McDonald's waiting for their next order. And I said to them, "How long have you been here?" "I've been here for an hour." "I've been here an hour and a half." Do you know, in this province, they're not getting paid for that hour and a half?

So as you're sitting here—everybody here sitting here, put your hand up if you're not getting paid. Everybody here is getting paid.

If you're a worker in the province of Ontario and you go to work at 9 o'clock in the morning, that employer should be paying you at least the minimum wage in the province of Ontario. To work in the province of Ontario and get paid absolutely nothing for your time is wrong. That's why I say gig workers are not treated with respect. They're not treated as equal. Under the Employment Standards Act, they should be included, and they should be being paid from the minute they go to work.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the member for his comments and certainly acknowledge the experience the member has in matters of labour and working workers. I've heard him speak many times on this. I wanted to follow up on the matters regarding his points on firefighters, because I certainly agree we need to support our firefighters.

I have met, this week, with some firefighters who were in for various meetings. They acknowledged the very significant support they've received from the government in a range of ways, and I was very encouraged by that. So I guess my question is, reflecting on what the industry is saying directly and representatives of the firefighting community, don't you think that's worth support for this proposal that we have before the House?

MPP Wayne Gates: I think I've been very clear: I support firefighters. But I've also been clear that everybody in this room supports firefighters. What I'm saying is that when you bring a bill forward, you should make sure that you're covering all the cancers that you know. Because the firefighters, when they came and met in your office, they told you about prostate. They told you that they were getting exposed—more than me; I'm exposed as well—but a 1.41% chance more that a firefighter is going to get prostate cancer.

So if you know—your party knows; you're in power and you can pass bills. You've got a majority government; you could pass it tomorrow. If you know you can do that and you know that firefighters are dying of prostate cancer, then why would you not include it in the bill? So you can look a firefighter right in the eye and say, "You know what? We support you. We know your brothers are dying of prostate cancer and we're going to fix it, and we're going to fix it today." Because every day we wait, 13 more people are dying in this—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you to the member from Niagara Falls for bringing up the plight of workers when they go to work and they get injured. If you go to work and you get injured, there's a good likelihood that you will end up in poverty, even though you're covered by WSIB, because you will be deemed, and that results in poverty.

I also want to talk about the workers that don't come home: the deaths, people that die on the job. At National Steel Car in Hamilton, we had three deaths in 20 months. National Steel Car had a bad track record even before these three deaths. Even though they had this bad track record, the fines that they received were \$140,000 each for Collin Grayley and Fraser Cowan, and a \$240,000 for Quoc Le.

Also, these fines do not go to the families. The families are left grieving. They don't get this money. They don't get support. It's also a concern to me and to others, like USW 7135, that these fines should be commensurate to the revenue of a company, because if it's a big corporation, these fines are just the cost of doing business.

So to the member: What do you think of that issue?

MPP Wayne Gates: I'll tell you about when I was president of my local union. One of the hardest things I ever had to do was take Joel Murray out of the plant when he was crushed at General Motors. And his wife, Wendy, and the kids—General Motors was fine. They pleaded guilty and they were fined \$300,000. You know what drove me nuts about that? The \$300,000 does not go to the family. The \$300,000 goes back into general revenue.

I have never understood why we've never changed that. If a company kills a worker, first, they should go to jail. The second part is, the fine should go to the family, because now the breadwinner—in this case, Joel, who had a good job at General Motors—is gone. Yet those kids have still got to go to university, they've still got to carry on. That money could go to making sure they get a post-secondary education because they lost their dad, because it was General Motors' fault that they killed Joel.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Final question?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, through you, one of the features of this bill, for the member from Niagara Falls, is creating alternative criteria for apprenticeship registration, which opens the doors for Ontarians who don't meet traditional academic standards, ensuring that no talent is untapped. I'd like to hear the member from Niagara Falls's thoughts on what that's going to do to expand opportunities in the skilled trades, particularly in your riding, where there are lots of people who would like to have that opportunity.

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MPP Wayne Gates: Yes, I do have a lot of Indigenous communities in my riding and have actually gone to the native centres. Through Niagara College, we have given more opportunities for Indigenous communities to get an apprenticeship so they can get hired in a workshop and they're able to carry on. That has been one of the good things that the native centre did in partnership with Niagara College.

The other thing you talked about that I want to get into about the skilled trades is that we still haven't done enough for the women in the skilled trades around protective equipment. I was at the firefighter breakfast, and a volunteer, a woman, was complaining that their gloves are still oversized. So maybe tell the minister for me: Let's get some really good gloves for the women, as well.

But that program is really good. I thank the native centre and Niagara College for what they're doing on trying to get more people exposed to the—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It is now time for further debate.

Mme Lucille Collard: I'll just start by saying that I will be sharing my time for the MPP for Don Valley West.

I want to start by saying that this bill—altogether, after reading it—is not a bad bill at all. It contains some very interesting measures that I know certain workers across the province will be glad to see implemented.

Schedule 1 implements job protections for those who need to go on leave to care for a new child as a result of an adoption or a surrogacy, or for those who need to take time to deal with a serious medical condition. These are important measures that directly affect mostly women, I would say. They should frankly have been implemented sooner, as far as I'm concerned, because there is nothing more important than taking care of our family; that needs to come first, and I'm sure you'll agree with that, Madam Speaker. We must empower workers to take care of themselves and their families first, so that when they come to work, they can be focused, efficient and effective on the job. This legislation will help to achieve that.

Schedule 4 takes steps to set standards for immigration representatives and impose penalties on those who exploit or defraud immigrants. Now, that's a very shameful practice, and it's very good that we're addressing that. Immigrants

are already facing many challenges when they come here, and we need to show that we value their contribution to our work force and our economy.

We have worker shortages in a number of sectors in Ontario, particularly in health care and education—and especially, I will say, from a French-language perspective. The francophone community in Ontario is in desperate need of qualified French-speaking teachers in our schools and French-speaking health care workers to provide needed care. Unfortunately, even if they come with foreign credentials, the certification process to work in Ontario often takes too long, costs too much and is too complicated, so these professionals end up working in jobs they are overqualified for, instead of contributing to address a shortage in important sectors like health care and education.

Further to conversation with leading experts in Manitoba, I'd like to invite the government to consider more ways to provide these workers with opportunities to work immediately in their field. In Manitoba, they created a clinical assistant position in their health care system, to give internationally trained physicians the opportunity to work in their field right away while they work towards their official licensing. That has proven to be very efficient in expediting the process of getting them to work. Positions like that can support internationally trained workers and help them better integrate into the work force here in Ontario in a productive manner.

Ontario's community health sector includes over 200,000 workers in areas like primary care, mental health, home care and long-term care. These workers play a crucial role in providing care outside of hospitals and emergency departments. However, they face a wage gap of over \$2 billion compared to their counterparts in hospitals and schools. This gap is leading to significant shortages of staff and impacting the quality of care.

A recent survey found that 94% of community health organizations cite compensation as the main challenge in hiring and retaining staff, contributing to increased wait times for services.

In addition, support workers in our non-profit sector also need urgent additional funding, and I hear that all the time. There are many, many organizations in my riding that provide essential services to some of the most vulnerable people in our society—workers at our food banks, shelters, community centres and children's aid societies, just as a few examples. Many of those organizations rely on government funding to operate, but due to insufficient funding, these organizations are often forced to get by with very little resources. This has a significant impact on their workers and their service delivery. Their staff are overworked, but they do their best to ensure that everyone is taken care of, regardless. These workers do extremely important work, and they deserve the support of their government.

Now I want to touch briefly on schedule 6, which includes firefighters and fire investigators in presumptive WSIB coverage for certain cancers. It's an important change, and I do support it. However, we have also heard from the wildland firefighters, who are concerned that they will not be included in this change. Wildland firefighters do not wear respirators and are often exposed to even more smoke than regular city firefighters. They have the same risk of developing cancer from their work, and they provide an essential service to this province. **It seems that the wildland firefighters have been explicitly excluded from coverage under the WSIB.** You can find specific examples of this exclusion under section 15 of the act. So I hope it's just an oversight or a mistake that the minister will correct before this bill is adopted.

Madam Speaker, I want to conclude by talking about small businesses, because when it comes to workers, small businesses are key. Small businesses play an extremely important role in our economy, providing jobs for millions of Ontario workers. When small businesses are supported, they can, in turn, better support their workers by improving working conditions, for example, and offering a competitive wage.

We need to do more to support small businesses in Ontario, including through tax cuts. My colleague the MPP for Don Valley West recently proposed legislation to reduce the tax burden on small businesses. The proposed changes would even have been retroactive to January 1, 2024, providing significant relief to small businesses, like those in my riding of Ottawa–Vanier, and the workers they employ.

I recently met with small craft brewers in Ottawa, and they explained to me and my colleagues that small brewers are taxed in a disproportionate manner compared to big breweries. That's something that we could change to help support the workers in our small breweries and other small businesses.

I'll leave my time to the MPP for Don Valley West.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to the Working for Workers Six Act.

Speaker, as my colleague from Ottawa–Vanier mentioned, there are a number of positive aspects to this bill, and they're certainly supportable; for example, the enhanced protections for firefighters as it relates to protective

equipment that fits. I actually have a young cousin, Sara Brown, who is a firefighter here in Ontario, and I know women firefighters like her will benefit from this kind of enhanced equipment that fits them better.

I also had the pleasure to meet this week with some Toronto firefighters, including firefighter Mike Smith, who works in my riding of Don Valley West. I just want to commend him. He was recently at a fire in the north end of the riding. Gladly, no one was seriously injured.

I want to thank Mike and all Toronto firefighters for their dedication to protecting our community.

Other good measures in this bill are to protect jobs for people who are enduring cancer and related treatment. I want to commend the government for listening and responding to the requests from organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society that want to make sure that the people who are enduring cancer and getting treatment have a job when they return and are able to work again.

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I'm proud of the Ontario Liberal history of supporting firefighters, particularly those battling those occupational diseases. It was in 2007 when Premier McGuinty, leading the Ontario Liberal government, amended the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to introduce presumptive coverage for firefighters impacted by eight different types of cancers, as well as heart injuries.

While the Conservative government has expanded presumptive coverage for many other types of cancers—which we, of course, support—there is still a lot more to do to support firefighters. As we heard this week when we met with them, diseases like kidney cancer, colorectal cancer, as well as catastrophic acute exposure, are things that they know that we need to continue to work and advance coverage for them.

I want to also talk about the workers who are actually enduring some difficult times right now. We know that with challenging economic times, despite the government's ads boasting about how everything is great here in Ontario—there were definitely jobs added since 2018, but it's not that jobs are actually all that plentiful right now. Labour conditions are not that buoyant. While we wouldn't disagree that job creation is certainly good news, we also think it's important for the government to be transparent about the concerning rise in joblessness, which is top of mind for families who are worried about how to put food on the table if they lose their paycheque. For tens of thousands of workers, the reality is that the labour market conditions are actually deteriorating, and one only has to look at rising unemployment levels to appreciate how the government's story around this is a bit off the mark.

When the previous Liberal government's mandate ended in 2018, unemployment was at 5.9%. It's currently at 6.8%. In fact, the increase in joblessness since this government took office is second only to what happened in the 1990s when the NDP formed government. Clearly, the government's record on job creation is not as strong as they would like us to believe. We need to make sure that we're doing things for those workers. How do we make sure that they are getting the access to—whether it's retraining, whether it's support as they look to going to food banks to put food on their families' tables. We know that record numbers of people are doing that, and those families need support. Things like a middle-income tax cut that this government promised in 2018 would help those families.

I also want to just point out that, under the previous Liberal government, Ontario accounted for almost half of all jobs created in Canada. Last year, the province's contribution declined to 38.3%. Again, that says that there are workers in Ontario who are actually struggling to find the work they want. That's why we know many workers are leaving Ontario, including construction workers going to other provinces where conditions are better for them to find employment and put food on their families' tables.

Under this government, the number of unemployed workers has swelled to 596,000. The ranks of unemployed workers have grown by one third since this government took office and it's taking longer for them, once they're unemployed, to find new jobs. In fact, one quarter of all jobseekers are falling into long-term unemployment, which means it's taking them at least six months or more to get rehired. Labour market conditions are a lot tougher than what this government is willing to admit to.

We know that private sector employment—as my colleague from Ottawa–Vanier pointed out, many of those jobs come from small businesses. Two thirds of the private sector jobs come from small businesses, and we know that they are hurting right now. We know that they're closing their doors at a more rapid pace. Bankruptcies are up this year over last year. We know that that working-age population and labour force participation has declined since the beginning of this government's mandate, which means a growing number of discouraged workers who are losing hope of finding a job and they're just dropping out of the labour force. That data is telling us that the government is falling short on creating the number of jobs needed to improve the economic well-being of households in this province.

While we need to make sure that we are focused on workers who have jobs—and this bill addresses some of the gaps that they are facing—we need to also make sure that we focus on job creation, especially those who are actually in the goods-producing industries. It's actually gone down under this government. So far this year, we've seen the manufacturing sector lose 12,000 jobs. In construction, 14,000 jobs were lost. Those, we know, are good-paying jobs that help put food on people's families' tables, so I encourage the government to spend some time thinking about that and make sure they're addressing those workers' needs.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It's now time for questions.

Mr. Rick Byers: I thank the members for their comments and reflecting, frankly, on some appreciated positive comments on the bill—although both said more could be done, and I think that's always the case.

As I reflect on so many of the bills that we put forward and contrasting very good versus perfect—and, I guess, reflecting on so many of the good measures in the bill as well as other measures we've done to support workers and skilled trades and apprenticeships and across such a broad spectrum—I guess that's my question: Could you acknowledge the important steps that are in this bill and help us by supporting the bill when it comes to a vote?

Mme Lucille Collard: I thank the member for his question. Right at the outset, I said this is not a bad bill, and I've enumerated the number of ways in which it's a good bill and it's bringing good measures. Of course, none of the bills that the government brings forward is ever to our full satisfaction, because we also see the needs that are not being addressed, and that's what our role is in the opposition: to point out to what can be done better.

Hopefully when a bill gets through a normal process and after second reading we get to committee, we get to hear from people, we have time to debate the bill, then we can really bring forward some recommendation for some improvements. Unfortunately, this is not going to happen. So, we have to trust that what's on paper is going to be as good as it says it's going to be, but at the same time, I want to forcefully remind the government that we always need to do better and there are a lot of people who are still in a lot of needs that are not being taken care of by this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

MPP Wayne Gates: During my presentation I talked a lot about gig workers and how they're being treated unfairly, where they're sitting there for an hour, an hour and a half, collecting no money.

So my question to you is, would the Liberal Party agree with the NDP that they should be covered under the Employment Standards Act and have all the benefits of being covered by the Employment Standards Act?

Mme Lucille Collard: What the Liberal Party is always in favour of is defending the people that are vulnerable and are not treated fairly, so whatever it takes. Again, we've talked extensively about our small businesses and the people that do the work, and that everybody should be treated fairly and with equity, with working conditions that are fair. We don't see that happening across the board.

You're mentioning the gig workers, but I can—think about the nurse practitioners, which we talk a lot about these days in this House. They've got no wage increase. We're putting more on their responsibility, yet there is a big wage gap that needs to be addressed. So, I do hope that the government will address that, and the Liberals will support these measures when they're fair and equitable.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. David Smith: I want to thank the members for your presentation. I overheard about the job situation; it's not truly reflected. I see a number of investments coming into Ontario, and obviously jobs are created by those initiatives.

I have a question for the member. Ontario workers deserve transparency and fairness in the hiring process. That is why our government wants to require employers to disclose compensation range, job vacancy information and use of AI in hiring, for the needs of making information decisions about the future. Will the member support these efforts that create fairness and a more equitable hiring process, or will they stand against workers' right to transparency and opportunities?

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you for the question. Certainly, transparency is something that we've been talking a lot about, especially today, when it comes to the lack of transparency around the Ontario Place deal and the billions of dollars that taxpayers are going to be on the hook for. So, while I find that it's important, absolutely, for workers to have access to things like pay grids and other things, that when their résumés are going through AI—I think those are good practices that should be considered, and if done fairly, certainly we would support, but I find it a little bit

interesting that the government is talking about transparency when they've been found doing the opposite of that, in particular this week.

1400

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: A question for either colleague in the Liberal caucus: Anti-scab legislation has been something that has been left out of this particular bill. What it refers to is the use of replacement workers during strikes or lockouts. At the federal level, our colleagues there—Conservatives, New Democrats, Bloc, Liberal and Green—agreed to pass federal anti-scab legislation. I'm wondering what your reflections are about that not being in this bill.

We have a labour dispute in Ottawa at Best Theratronics in Kanata that is going into its seventh month. This organization makes cutting-edge cancer-screening equipment, and these workers want to go back to work, but the employer is using replacement workers to avoid bargaining in good faith.

I'm wondering if that is something you could support as a good amendment to this bill.

Mme Lucille Collard: I want to thank the member for Ottawa Centre for his question—always interesting questions where we're trying to corner the Liberal Party about their position on what they're going to do.

We are supportive of fair treatment in the workplace, whether it's the employers or the workers. We've talked a lot about the anti-scab legislation. It is not in this bill. It could have been, and then it would have been a really good discussion to have. Unfortunately, it's not there.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the members for their input on this bill. I know you said you would support a lot of this bill; you thought there were a lot of good things in here. I don't think I heard you comment on the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program and the pathway for self-employed physicians. Obviously, I think it's a good idea if we get more physicians working in Ontario, and I'm just wondering if you were going to be supporting that part of the bill, if you support that part of the bill. We look forward to having that support.

Mme Lucille Collard: Thank you for the question. I did make reference to how foreign credentials need to be recognized in a more efficient way. Whatever we have right now, it's definitely not optimal. I did say the process to get accreditation to be able to work in Ontario is too long, is too costly, is too complicated, and those foreign workers end up working in fields that they are overqualified for. We need to speed up that process and make it more efficient. I meet too many cab drivers who should be working in our hospitals or our health care system, or even the education system.

I did mention, though, and I want to reiterate that the example from Manitoba that created a clinical assistant position which allows those people with health care experience—not experience; they don't have the experience. They have some expertise, and they can't be hired until they get experience, so by being able to enter the workforce at a lower level as a clinical assistant, they have the benefit of gaining that experience and getting an entry door to a good job.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

MPP Wayne Gates: One thing I'm extremely proud of is that the NDP is the only caucus where all their employees are unionized. They get fair wages, fair benefits and a pension plan—something that nobody in this room has, by the way.

My question to you is, I think, one of fairness: Although none of your employees are unionized, do you agree with the NDP that it should be easier to unionize in the province of Ontario?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you for the question. I think that there are lots of employers who treat their workers fairly, whether they are unionized or not. While I absolutely support the NDP caucus's right and privilege to have unionized employees, I think that it really is up to the employees who are working, as well as the employer, to have a positive working relationship, and I think that can be done both in a unionized and a non-unionized environment.

I think pensions are absolutely important and critical. We need to do more to expand pension coverage in this province. Certainly, there are workers here who deserve pensions, and I hope that the government will work to make that happen.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the discussion today on Working for Workers Six Act, 2024.

I appreciate the contributions thus far today, although I must say, picking up on my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound—and I appreciated his question because I have been here for a while, and I have been here for a while in government. It’s interesting when we bring in a bill—not so much the Liberals, because they’re not always as engaged, but I listen to the NDP, and they will talk about everything but what’s in the bill. They will talk about how, “Well, we should have done this. We should have done that. You should have this. You should have that,” and the member for Niagara Falls is a champion of that.

Then, if we bring in a bill that they think steps over the line of how focused and narrowly delineated that bill should be, then they accuse us of bringing in legislation that is just unfair, because it encompasses—what’s the—I’m trying to think of the word. I can’t even come up with the word of what we call those pieces, those bills that cover everything.

Mr. John Vanthof: Omnibus.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Omnibus; thank you very much. Omnibus.

Then they accuse you of doing too much in a bill, so it’s hard to get it right. And then they get up and, in their questions and their comments, they’re basically saying, “You didn’t fix everything that needs to be fixed in the province of Ontario and, indeed, Canada, and, indeed, the world, sometimes, in this particular piece of legislation.”

I’m just trying to picture what that bill that would fix everything would look like. I’ve been looking at the table and I know that it would not just collapse the table, but probably the floor here in the Chamber because of the weight of that bill itself. Does it not really make more sense to try to focus on what’s actually in the bill and ask themselves, is this a positive step or is it not?

When the New Democrats look at these bills, we’re bringing in things that, quite frankly, they may have talked about in the past, but it seems when it comes from the PC government, it’s just not as good as if they thought of it or if they brought it in. It really is regrettable because the whole way that this place is supposed to work is if there are good ideas coming forward and positive steps, that we should have the support of our colleagues in the House, regardless of the fact that they live in a partisan world.

When we look at this bill, it’s hard to look at this bill and say, “This part of the bill is a bad idea. Oh, and this part of the bill, that’s not going to help. This part of the bill is actually going to set workers back. And this bill, boy, the workers are going to be really upset about that.” But no, there’s not a thing in this bill that they can actually say that. Since we became government in 2018, we have been on a mission to make the world of workers a better world; on a mission to make the world of workers better. So, from successive ministers—Ministers Scott, McNaughton and, today, Piccini—everything that we’ve done in our Working for Workers legislation, from 1 to 6, has made the world—or will make, if passed, number 6—will make the world of workers better.

Where I think the opposition is failing—if it’s the job of opposition to someday form government, they’re actually failing miserably, because they are losing the support and the confidence of the working community out there. Private sector unions all across Ontario are looking at this government, the Doug Ford Progressive Conservative government, and saying, “You people are recognizing what our lives are like. You are actually doing the kinds of things that are going to make our lives better.” I know they can’t argue against this—me, what I’m saying right now, or against us on that statement—because all across the province that’s what we’re hearing back.

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I know the member for Niagara Falls and the member for Don Valley West talked about meeting with firefighters yesterday at the reception. Well, I was there too. I met with firefighters. In fact, I met with Mike Smith, a firefighter from here in Toronto. Incidentally, he mentions to me, when he knows where I’m from, that his grandmother passed away, Gloria Mandy. Gloria and Dick Mandy—I curled with Dick Mandy many years ago—two people, pure salt of the earth, lived up in the Round Lake area. Gloria passed away recently. This was Mike Smith’s grandmother. Like I say, the Mandys were just wonderful people. I had a great chat with Mike and other members of the Toronto fire department here at Queen’s Park at the reception last night.

I also spoke to firefighters from Windsor. I know we have a member from Windsor in our caucus and we have a member from Windsor in the opposition caucus.

I’ll tell you, folks, firefighters are lauding the work that we have done as government to recognize presumptive cancers, recognize presumptive illnesses and to do more and more. Each and every time we bring a piece of labour legislation out, we are doing more to protect and support firefighters at that time, that most difficult time in their lives and their families’ lives, if they should be diagnosed with one of a growing list of presumptive cancers.



I will say to the member from Don Valley West, she's right. I was here when the former Liberal government brought in coverage for presumptive cancers. We supported that. We supported that as the PC opposition at the time because we knew it was the right thing to do. And incrementally and progressively—and it really took off in a big way with our government—the government has expanded that coverage to ensure that our firefighters do have that confidence that when they have our backs, when they're going in to protect us and perhaps even save us, we have their backs when the job is done.

And when they've been on the job for a number of years and they are then, many of them, inflicted with cancers that, while they're out in the general society but not to the kind of extent that firefighters can be diagnosed with, these illnesses—because we know when you're going into burning buildings, you're going into a chemical soup, you could almost call it. When flammable materials are burning, God knows what are in those vapours to damage you as one of the people that is in those buildings. Regardless of the fact that we do everything we can to provide them with protective equipment, we know that that environment is not one that most of us would ever want to be in—although I do take my hat off to the member for Brantford—Brant, Will Bouma, who is a volunteer firefighter himself and over the years has seen those circumstances himself.

I think what I want to make clear is that we are continuously doing things. One of the things I heard the member for Ancaster talk about: the lack of fines. Well, our fines are going to minimum fines of \$500,000 for corporations convicted of repeated offences within a two-year period under the Occupational Health and Safety Act. That is a minimum of \$500,000.

So we are doing the kinds of things that we're hearing from labour across the province about what we can do to actually better protect them and make them not only safer on the job, because if you bring in legislation that says to bad actors, "Listen, folks: The penalty is going to get bigger. You're going to really start to feel it if you are doing things that are endangering the lives of your workers"—your workers are your greatest asset. It doesn't matter what business you're in, whether it's public or private or construction or any other—manufacturing or anything else. I know the member from Niagara Falls talked about a worker at the auto plant. It doesn't matter what line of work you're talking about; your greatest asset are the people who work for you and do that work every day. You cannot be successful as a company—we can't be successful as politicians if we don't have great, competent, adequate staff to support us as well. So we're making sure that those people are protected in that environment.

I know the member for Don Valley West talked about job numbers in her address, and I have to take umbrage with that to some degree. I was here. There are not many people who were here way back then—it says, I guess, how my age maybe is; I'm revealing something or saying too much about it. But there's not many people who were here during the crisis period when the McGuinty Liberals, through their tax-and-spend and energy policies, drove 300,000 manufacturing jobs out of the province of Ontario.

If they want to look back to a dark day for jobs and workers in the province of Ontario, when those good jobs were leaving the province in droves because they couldn't afford—it wasn't that the workers didn't want to be here and work, it was that companies could not afford to operate in Ontario. Now that's a telling story, that companies could not afford to operate here under the Liberals' high-tax, high-spend lack of support for the business environment. It actually drove companies to say—and it is not free to uproot yourselves and move somewhere else, but they were making the decision that it is a better business choice to shut it down and move our facilities and our manufacturing capabilities somewhere else. So you have to ask yourself: What kind of environment were they living in or working in at that time?

I know the Liberals have some of their own researchers coming up with numbers that they want to hear, but you ask the man on the street, the person on the street: "Do you think the Ontario economy today and the opportunities in Ontario's economy today and the opportunities for you as a worker are better or worse than they were under the McGuinty Liberals?" You know what the answer is. You don't even have to ask them. Sitting here today, you know what those people's answer is going to be: "The opportunities are much greater. The conditions that we have to work under are much better. The wages are much better. The benefits are much better, because we have a better environment."

My son is a supervisor in the construction industry, and when she mentioned that people can't get work—well, you need to talk to some of these people who are doing building here in the construction industry. Ask them how difficult it is to get workers and how much they support what we have done in the last number of years to encourage more people to get into the skilled trades. We're opening every door possible so that those young people, men and women, can get into the skilled trades and have a really good high-paying, highly compensated job with high benefits that they couldn't have before because those companies weren't building new factories; they weren't

building new facilities. They were shutting them down and running south where they could be more successful and make a living manufacturing goods.

One of the things that drove them out of the country, more than anything else, was the energy policy of the previous Liberal government. High energy costs: If you're in the manufacturing business or any kind of business that requires a significant amount of energy to operate, that is one of your biggest expenses. Under the previous Liberal government, energy costs were one of the main catalysts for determining, "We can't stay here. We can't stay in Ontario; we've got to go elsewhere." So away they did.

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Now, what have we done since we came to office? We have stabilized energy costs so that manufacturers know that here in Ontario, not only will you have affordable energy, but you will have reliable access to clean, green, affordable, reliable energy. The two things that people want if you're the buyer of energy: You want it to be affordable; you want it to be reliable. If you're on the side of producing it and you're in the government, you also want to add that it's environmentally responsible, because we have a responsibility not only to this generation, but to subsequent generations to give them a better world than we have today. It's our job to treat the world and the earth with respect.

And we're doing all that, encompassed in our Affordable Energy Act. Why? Because we want to make sure that those jobs stay here. And we know that the demand and the requirement for electricity between now and 2050, according to the IESO—the Independent Electricity System Operator says the demand of electricity is going to go up by 75%. Now that's a staggering number, Speaker: 75%. That means that the demand for electricity in Ontario will go up by an amount that would be more than enough to power four cities like the GTA, the greater Toronto area. That is not the amount of electricity we're going to need; that's the amount of new electricity we're going to need to power the needs of Ontario by 2050.

We know that also, in order to do that—what are you going to need? You're going to need workers. If you're going to build that generation, you better be building transmission. It doesn't matter if you've got the best product in the world; if you can't get it to your markets, you're not going to sell any, right? We're going to need workers. So what's the best way to ensure that you're going to have those workers? Make darn sure you're treating them right. And that's what we are doing in Ontario: We're going to make sure they have the jobs, and they're going to be the kind of jobs that they're going to be proud to have, proud to do and happy that they get home safe every night as well. That's what we plan to do here in the province of Ontario. That's part of the suite of bills that we're bringing in.

So we have the Affordable Energy Act on one hand. We've had five Working for Workers acts and now Working for Workers 6, So it's a package deal, folks. You start to put these things together and you can start to actually see the vision of Doug Ford and the PC government. How are we going to make sure that Ontario is the best that it can be going forward? We're doing all of those things collectively and intertwined, just dovetailing everything together. So we know that we can stand up and confidently say we've got Ontario pointed in the right direction.

Now, don't take my word for it, Speaker; take the word of people who are responding to questions and surveys and polls all across this province who are being asked, "If an election were held today, who would you support?" Numbers that are staggering are saying, "We would support Doug Ford and the PCs," because they have the same kind of confidence in the future under this government that we have knowing that, leading this province, we will be able to give them the kind of Ontario that they deserve.

Speaker, the Working for Workers Six Act—I haven't had a chance to go delve in my speech today because, my God, that clock runs. But just a little snapshot of some of the things: cracking down on bad-actor employers; introducing game-changing—strengthening protections for roadside maintenance workers by expanding existing requirements for motorists to slow down and move over under the Highway Traffic Act. One of the highest, most dangerous, most likely places that you can be killed as a worker in Ontario is getting hit by a car. We're going to make sure that we're doing everything we can to make those workers safer. One of my first jobs back in 1975 was on road construction, paving the highways through Algonquin Park. I can tell you that the safety measures taken to protect us as workers in 1975 were pretty minimal compared to what we're seeing today, and we're going to continue to make them more and more stronger for the people of Ontario.

Royal assent / Sanction royale

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Before we move on to questions and answers, I beg to inform the House that in the name of His Majesty the King, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in her office.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Julia Douglas): The following are the titles of the bills to which her honour did assent:

An Act to amend various energy statutes respecting long term energy planning, changes to the Distribution System Code and the Transmission System Code and electric vehicle charging / Loi modifiant diverses lois sur l'énergie en ce qui a trait à la planification énergétique à long terme, aux modifications touchant les codes appelés Distribution System Code et Transmission System Code et à la recharge des véhicules électriques.

An Act to enact two Acts and to amend various Acts with respect to public safety and the justice system / Loi édictant deux lois et modifiant diverses lois relatives à la sécurité publique et au système judiciaire.

An Act to amend various Acts / Loi modifiant diverses lois.

**December 4, 2024**

**Working for Workers Six Act, 2024** / Loi de 2024 visant à œuvrer pour les travailleurs, six

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm happy to ask my neighbour upriver a question. I enjoyed his presentation as always.

Schedule 2 of this bill—he ended on this note: He talked about the fact that the government, rhetorically at least, is committed to defending the safety of road workers, and I was interested to hear that that was something you've got personal experience with. I know in my critic role, I spoke to a bunch of road workers in recent years who were telling me the precise opposite. They're telling me that the government's decision to increase speed limits in places like Carnage Alley, outside London, Ontario, on the 401, puts them at direct risk, particularly because—as I understand it at least; perhaps the member can clarify if I'm mistaken—some of the improvements that need to be made there will require significant investments in road safety done by construction workers.

So to the member: Why is the government on the one hand, through schedule 2, talking about protecting workers who are working hard on our roads, and on the other hand, increasing speed limits which the evidence would suggest leads to them being less safe?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, I thank the member for Ottawa Centre. It's interesting that he would bring that up in that regard, because I don't know if it's a chicken or the egg, the cart or the horse or whatever, but those highways that we have recognized are challenging with regard to safety—construction projects are planned for those stretches of highway, as you would know.

And when a highway is under construction, it's not subject to the same speed limits that we would have on an open highway. We all know that. Everybody who has driven through a construction zone knows that the speed limits are lowered significantly during that time, and if workers are present, we've made sure that the fines under those are doubled under those conditions. So are we doing everything to make sure that those workers are safe under a construction regiment? Absolutely, and we're going to continue to do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I enjoyed the remarks from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing—I can't remember the last one.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Pembroke.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Pembroke—how could I forget Pembroke?

Anyway, I would like him to elaborate a little more on the protection for firefighters and why that's so important to many of the improvements we've made to the Working for Workers.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you to the member for Sarnia–Lambton. I have a list here of all the presumptive cancers, but I won't go through them because I wouldn't be able to do it in a minute. But it is a list that continues to grow.

Why are we doing it? Well, we're doing it because those are some of the finest people we have as citizens here in the province of Ontario—some of the finest and the brightest, those who are willing to go in while we're going out; those who are willing to go into danger while we are doing what we can to escape the danger, if we're not already out.

So it's incumbent upon us, not just as government but all of society—because they protect everybody every day. Whatever we can do to give them the confidence that we have their backs—because they take on a role, a job, an occupation that is dangerous, we're going to make sure that we have their backs.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: I always enjoy the remarks from the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. He was one of the first speakers that I ever listened to when I got elected many years ago, and he is one of the best speakers in this House. Now, I don't agree often with his philosophy, but he's the only guy who can speak for 20 minutes and, in the last 49 seconds, actually talk about the bill. But he spent his first while talking about how we in the opposition always talk about things that should've, could've been in the bill.

When we were talking about highway safety, one of the things that should've, could've been in a bill about working for workers is actually making sure that workers are protected on our highways, ensuring that the transport drivers on the highways actually are adequately trained and tested. The Auditor General brought this up and CBC brought this up. We brought this forward many times.

Does the member think that that should be coming up in the next Working for Workers bill?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I don't know that it would come in a Working for Workers bill; it might come in a transportation bill. But we recognize that there is a challenge. We see it all across the country. It's not Ontario—it's not singularly in Ontario.

We have programs to ensure—we have licensing requirements to ensure that our truck drivers are properly trained. There are also some shenanigans sometimes that go on, that people get by the rules. We know that it doesn't matter what the rules are—I'm going to take no more than 49 seconds to explain it to you—there are people that will try to get around the rules.

That's why we have enforcement. We only catch a speeder if we catch them. You only fine somebody breaking the law if you catch them. We're going to do everything we can and we are doing everything we can to make our highways safer than ever, and we're going to stay on that track.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, through you, there are many aspects of this bill that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke spoke so well about. But there's a couple of aspects—lowering costs for apprentices and businesses, and the effect of that on our economy—that I'd like him to expand on, please, Speaker, through you. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have to get my glasses on for this one. So, through our Working for Workers 6 package, we will waive the \$150 exam fee for apprentices taking their initial certificate of qualification, eliminating financial barriers and making it easier for workers to achieve their certification and advance their careers. Removing the fee is a simple way to get more money in the pockets of young men and women looking to enter the trades.

One of the reasons we don't have the labour workforce we need is because the previous Liberal government created a complex web that included punishing costs on the trades. They taxed the trades to the brink of extinction. We're lowering premiums to \$1.25, the lowest average businesses premium rate in half a century, providing significant cost savings to businesses and reinforcing Ontario's position as a competitive place to do business.

These are some of the things that we are doing to make Ontario the place to grow, live, work—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further questions?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is regarding, very specifically, people that are injured and killed on the job. April 28 is the labour movement's most solemn day; it's the international workers' day of mourning. I spoke earlier about deaths that we saw in Hamilton at National Steel Car: Collin Grayley, Fraser Cowan, Quoc Le. They were killed within 21 months—three deaths in 21 months at National Steel Car. They were fined \$140,000 per death.

I happened to be at a workers' day of mourning where I heard the family members and the children of those that were killed speak. It was really heartbreaking for them to say that they don't have a father, they're going to university, they're going to miss those moments. But it was also really shocking for me to understand that none of these fines—this money doesn't go to the families. Once their husband, their father is killed, they are left on their own.

Does the member think that a portion of these fines should go to supporting family members who are left behind once they have lost loved ones killed in the workplace?

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Thank you for the question.

I have been at many of these days of mourning, when a worker is injured and killed on the job, over the years. It is a tragedy, and it is something that none of us ever would like to be participating in. One death on the job is one too many.

Where I come from, we've had many injuries, many workers killed on the job. I come from a very intensive forestry-related part of the province, and forestry is one of the most dangerous jobs out there. Years ago, when most of those trees were felled by a slasher, as they called them, who felled the trees with a chainsaw, we had many, many people who were killed on that job, one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. However, technology has changed that.

We're continuing to bring technology into the workplace to make it safer and safer, and we're always going to do what we can do to protect workers.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Further debate?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Speaker.

Remarks in Anishiniimowin.

It's always an honour to be able to rise on behalf of the people of Kiiwetinoong—and today, to speak on Bill 229, Working for Workers Six Act, 2024.

Kiiwetinoong is, as you know, a very unique riding. It's 294,000 square kilometres. There are four small municipalities, and there are 31 First Nations—and then there are 24 fly-in First Nations that are there. The previous speaker spoke about firefighters who were here yesterday—Windsor, Toronto. I'm afraid to say that, in Kiiwetinoong, we don't have firefighters to be able to access the service in itself. I've been to a number of tragedies because of fires in some of these First Nations—and whereby they don't have the capacity, whereby they don't have the training, the people, even the fire hall, to be able to fight a house fire, for example.

This bill was tabled by the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, but it would make amendments to a number of acts. Because this bill was tabled by a Minister of Labour, I would like to begin by speaking about employment in the riding of Kiiwetinoong, with the hope that this can influence the minister or even this government to consider the needs of the residents of Kiiwetinoong for future decisions.

Sioux Lookout is a small town of 6,000 people, but Sioux Lookout is a hub in the northwest for the riding of Kiiwetinoong. It's a hub for the northern fly-in First Nations, where people travel through—through airplanes, scheduled flights. They travel across the riding of Kiiwetinoong in order to access health care, in order to access the other services in the town of Sioux Lookout or Thunder Bay.

One of the things that we face in Sioux Lookout is that employers find it difficult to recruit for open positions because the town is not equipped to accommodate more residents. We need housing. Not only is there a shortage of housing, which—time and time again, I speak on it. I don't know how many times. But there is a shortage.

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And when we talk about family doctors—actually, not family doctors. We don't have family doctors. We have community doctors. For example, in Kingfisher Lake, we have a community doctor who only services that community. Then the rest of that time—say that physician's services are five days per month of physician service for that community, which means, in a year, there are 60 days of physician services for that community, for that First Nation. Out of those five days per week, two of those days are travel days, so there are actually three physician days of service for that community. So we don't have family doctors; we have community doctors.

Last week, I spoke about the number of patients in Sioux Lookout without a family doctor. If you live in Sioux Lookout, a community of 6,000 people is without a family doctor. Back in 2022, there were 3,100 without a family doctor. That number is huge, enormous, in a town which in 2022 had, again, a population of not even close to 6,000.

To work for workers, as this government says it is, we must ensure that communities in Ontario, such as Sioux Lookout, have the capacity to house workers and provide them the necessary services.

When we look at Bill 229, one of the things it talks about is schedule 6 of this bill that amends section 15.1 but also 15.2 of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, which creates presumptions which are applied to "certain" firefighters and fire investigators. These amendments include to establish presumptions in respect to primary-site kidney cancer and primary colorectal cancer. When we talk about firefighters, specifically wildland firefighters are, again, omitted from this bill, following a pattern of excluding wildland firefighters from legislation that refers to firefighters.

One of the things about Kiiwetinoong: We are rich in Kiiwetinoong. We are rich in resources. We are rich in the lands that are there. We are rich in the forests that are in the north. I remember a lot of times when the wildland firefighters or the forest firefighters—a few years back, I remember—I’ve never actually been part of fighting forest fires, but I know, back in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, there used to be a lot of our people going firefighting, and everybody got trained to go firefighting. But nowadays, nobody is included. I remember a few years ago, in Cat Lake, there was a big fire near the First Nation, and they had 37 people ready to fight the fire. I remember talking to the chief like, “We are ready. This is our land. We know this land like the back of our hand.” And I remember they never got called to be part of that service, to be able to fight fires. How times have changed.

Going back to the firefighters: Again, the exclusion of these type of firefighters, forest firefighters, wildland firefighters, from legislation—they’re being omitted. And that begs the question: Why has this government specifically excluded wildland firefighters from these presumptive changes? It is, of course, within this government’s power to include wildland firefighters in this bill or just to easily reclassify wildland firefighters so that they are considered firefighters in all aspects of the law. So why won’t they?

On Monday, December 2, after this bill, Bill 229, was first debated, OPSEU president JP Hornick wrote an urgent letter to the office of the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development about this exclusion. To date, I understand that there has been no response. I will read from that letter:

“As we’ve made clear on behalf of our members who work as wildland firefighters and wildland fire investigators, the bill as written does not indicate that the minister is fulfilling his promise to include these workers in the presumptive coverage under the WSIB, and making sure service during the fire season counts as a year of service.

“This might very well be a mistake in drafting; however, we need assurance that these issues will be corrected.

“The heart of the issue is that while the government has added definitions for wildland firefighters and wildland fire investigators under section 14(1) of the act, the relevant clauses which govern presumptive coverage were not amended to include these new titles.

“For example, s. 15.1(1) of the act, titled ‘Heart injury,’ states that:

“‘If a worker is prescribed under clause (8)(a) and sustains an injury to the heart in circumstances prescribed under clause (8)(c), the injury is presumed to be a personal injury arising out of and in the course of the worker’s employment as a firefighter or fire investigator, unless the contrary is shown. 2007, c. 3, s. 2.’

“Another example is s. 15.1(4.1), titled ‘Restriction,’ which states:

“‘The presumption in subsection (4.1) does not apply unless the worker was employed as a full-time firefighter, part-time firefighter or fire investigator or served as a volunteer firefighter for a total of at least 15 years before being diagnosed. 2024, c. 3,’ schedule “4, s. 1(1).’

“You’ll immediately notice from both of these examples that the newly defined wildland firefighters and wildland fire investigator have clearly been left out of any coverage under the legislation.

1450

“There is also no amendment defining service during the fire season as a year of service.

“We need urgent assurances that this will be corrected, and that wildland firefighters and wildland fire investigators will be protected.

“Without this, we remind you that retention and recruitment for wildland firefighters and wildland fire investigators will continue to be a major issue for your government and, indeed, for the province.

“We are looking for an expedited response to this matter, as debate will begin later this afternoon.” And that’s the end of the quote.

Speaker, I know that a wildland firefighter is here with us today, listening to this debate. Noah Freedman, local vice-president with OPSEU from Sioux Lookout, is with us here today. Noah and other members of his crew deserve to be protected in the law. They deserve the presumptive coverage that other types of firefighters are receiving under the WSIB. I remember Noah Freedman told CBC, “We’ve already heard directly from Caroline Mulroney’s staff at the Treasury Board that we could be reclassified with the stroke of a pen. It’s really up to Caroline Mulroney and Doug Ford”—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I interrupt—I apologize, but we do not refer to members in the Legislature by their name, but rather their title.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: That’s just the way the letter was written. I’m not—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Just to clarify, just for your understanding—I know it wasn't intended to go against the rules, but regardless of what the letter states, we still substitute the position of the person in the Legislature. We do not refer to names.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: —“and the will of the government to do this.”

I think that's the work—again, I talk about the will of the government. I talk about the will of—you know, I always talk about room for improvement. I just want to go back. I only have a few minutes, but I want to finish my remarks and I want to reflect on something that was not included in the bill.

I know that when we talk about the Employment Standards Act as being amended through Bill 229 in multiple ways, and it does not include a change which we debated last week—the private member's bill, Bill 221. Bill 221, obviously, is my private member's bill that was debated last Thursday, November 28, which would have made September 30 a statutory holiday, a day of reflection for truth and reconciliation. I know just a few days ago, on Monday the 2nd, the House voted on this bill. While I am grateful for the support from some colleagues, the PC government chose to vote against the bill. The motion was declared lost.

I talk about that because one of the amendments of the bill was to the Employment Standards Act, 2000. Bill 221 would have amended the definition of a public holiday in subsection 1(1) of the Employment Standards Act, 2000, which is to add a day of reflection for Indian residential schools. Speaker, I know that this amendment, in the language of the minister, would have worked for workers. It would have given the workers time to learn about the truth of Canada's history, but also to reflect on the impact of the Indian residential school system.

It would have allowed workers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to spend a day with their families and participate in events with their community, something that the children who were sent to Indian residential schools were prevented from doing. And the ones that never made it home: We are still trying to search for them. We are still trying to find them.

It would have meant that staff members who already observe this day would no longer have to request a day off. It would have closed the gap between unionized and non-unionized workers, since many unions already observe September 30.

I hope that, moving forward, the minister and the government will change their mind in supporting that bill. It talks about some of the labour changes that they are doing. But I will end my remarks there. Meegwetch.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): It is now time for questions.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you very much to the member. I recently met, as I know many of us have, with the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association representatives, with firefighters. I'm wondering if the member could speak to some of the priorities that they outlined: kidney cancer, colorectal cancer, catastrophic acute exposure. All of these illnesses are things that are disproportionately impacting firefighters. They run into the house to save us, to save our loved ones, to save our pets, as we run out. Many of us may not have the courage that they have to save lives the way they do.

They know their job comes with risk, but can you express how important it is for this Conservative government to care for these fire workers, protect them, and put in place policies that help them get the care they need for cancers as soon as possible—lowering the latency period, for instance?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the question. I would like to acknowledge that if you have firefighters in your city in Ontario, in your municipality in Ontario, you are very lucky to have access to these firefighters.

I think one of the most difficult times ever was probably back in May 2019. It was 5 o'clock in the morning. We were sitting in the house. I got a call at 5 o'clock in the morning from up north that there was a house fire and that there were five people lost. Two days later, I flew up there, just to see. There was no service, nobody to fight those fires. I think that's a tragedy in itself. You guys are lucky to have firefighters in your towns and municipalities and you should be thankful for that.

Mr. John Jordan: I want to thank the member opposite for his comments. I do appreciate that in rural communities, health care is difficult, and in the Far North it's even more difficult to recruit and retain staff.

One of the things that this bill does is it expands the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. Pathways specifically include self-employed positions streamlining their immigration process. It removes the unnecessary barriers, all that red tape stuff that delays their ability to work in their profession of choice. It directly addresses health care labour choices, ensuring Ontario families have access to the care they need, and prioritizes recruitment in rural and northern areas.



I'm just wondering if the member can comment on his feelings whether these additional measures that this government has taken for rural and northern health care will further assist his communities.

1500

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for the question. Thank you. As the First Peoples of these lands, we welcome all newcomers. We welcome all immigrants that come here to have a good life. However, again, we cannot stand by and watch bad actors exploit newcomers, immigrants, new students, international students coming here to build a good life. We welcome action from this government to crack down on predatory immigration consultants taking advantage of people. We cannot let this go on.

But I think, specifically in the north, there is so much happening. There are so much less resources when we talk about access to services. For example, it's health care. For example, it's housing. For example, there's accessing the critical health care workers that we need. I think it's important—again, the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement, and I think that this government can do much better if they listen to the people from the north. Meegwetch.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): Question?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: To the member from Kiiwetinoong, I want to thank you for bringing forward your private member's bill—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly): I have to apologize to the member. I really do apologize. However, pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned, unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, please adjourn the debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

#### **December 10, 2024**

**Working for Workers Six Act, 2024 / Loi de 2024 visant à œuvrer pour les travailleurs, six**

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 4, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 229, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la Semaine des métiers spécialisés et modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail ainsi qu'à d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to the order of the House passed earlier today, I am now required to put the question.

Mr. Piccini has moved second reading of Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters.

1520

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 will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Second reading vote deferred.

#### **December 11, 2024**

**Working for Workers Six Act, 2024 / Loi de 2024 visant à œuvrer pour les travailleurs, six**

Mr. Piccini moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 229, Loi édictant la Loi de 2024 sur la Semaine des métiers spécialisés et modifiant diverses lois relatives à l'emploi et au travail ainsi qu'à d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Good morning. Merry Christmas. It's an honour to rise this morning to speak to third reading of our sixth Working for Workers bill. I am always honoured to rise here to speak on behalf of the people I serve, so I first want to just thank them again—the people of Northumberland–Peterborough South—for electing me to this place. It is an honour to serve them.

This sixth Working for Workers bill—I've often said it's like Harry Potter. I'm starting to go through that movie with my wife over Christmas—and we're onto number 6; I can't wait for number 7. It's just like J.K. Rowling's trilogy. It keeps getting better and better.

Before I get going, I want to say a profound thank you. I spoke at length in the last reading about the incredible work that the ministry team does—all of the public servants. I also want to acknowledge the incredible ministry office team I get to work with each and every day—high pace. They work exceptionally hard, late nights. I want to thank them. That's an incredible political staff and team who work very diligently each and every day. It continues to be an honour to work with them, as they challenge me and work with the incredible people across Ontario to continue to strive to do better for workers of this great province.

So thank you to all of you—if any of you are watching. I'm grateful for you.

Before I continue, I also want to thank Premier Ford, who has been leading the way to ensure we support workers. His support for this bill, like in previous Working for Workers acts, really underscores his commitment to workers across Ontario. He knows, and I agree, that when we put workers first, we can ensure the Ontario dream remains alive and well—the best place to live, work and raise a family.

We know that an economy that doesn't work for workers doesn't work at all. Someone who really understands that is the parliamentary assistant, the member for Ajax. She has worked incredibly hard on this bill. It's an honour to work alongside her to serve—just down the highway from her. I appreciate the tireless work and perspective that she brings in our ministry every day. Thank you.

I also want to say that this legislation is a vessel and a culmination of voices all across Ontario, and a vessel that allows many to board, and those who have boarded this vessel—I want to thank the Canadian Cancer Society, Newcomer Women's Services, the Fire Fighters Association of Ontario, the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, the firefighter chiefs of Ontario, the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, the road builders' association, union partners, agencies like the **Workplace Safety and Insurance Board** and Skilled Trades Ontario, and people who have shared their stories. There are so many, Speaker. I could keep going.

It's stories like Zane, Baden and Scottie Colt—a family through surrogacy, who deserve the same job-protected parental leave as others. We know that there can be no greater joy than growing your family and welcoming a beautiful child into this world. For surrogate parents like them—their voice is reflected in the legislation.

People like Nadia Headley, who shared her story of surviving cancer—Speaker, you could hear a pin drop in the room when she spoke about surviving cancer and getting those dreaded words that nobody wants to hear: “You have cancer.”

Nadia, thank you for sharing your story. Your story is reflected in this legislation.

People like Lavanya, who was targeted by fraudulent immigration consultants—they scammed her out of the Ontario dream.

Natasha Ferguson has had to jerry-rig personal protective equipment and overcome so many obstacles, as a woman of colour leading a business—facing challenges as a business owner, but then faces challenges just on a job site when it comes to personal protective equipment. As my colleague the MPP from Brampton says, “You have to see me to be me.” Natasha is a remarkable role model for so many.

I recall a power line technician who spoke to the meeting of Ministers of Labour about using gloves two sizes too large for her when she was working on a power line.

Of course, the firefighters, who run into danger to protect our community—their voices are reflected in this bill. Chief Cunliffe from Hamilton, Greg Horton, Gavin Jacklyn, Bob McCutcheon—those champions for firefighters, who have been such strong advocates. They just had their lobby day here at Queen's Park, and I know they spoke to members of all parties about the important work that firefighters do on a daily basis and about how we can serve those who serve us.

This Working for Workers bill builds on previous success. This bill focuses on four main themes: supporting the health and well-being of workers and their families, keeping costs down for workers and businesses, honouring workers, and growing Ontario's workforce as we tackle our declining productivity as a nation.

Speaker, this is a critical time that we introduce this bill, when we see declining productivity, slipping from sixth to 18th under the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD—slipping from the sixth most productive nation to 18th. How did we get here? We got here through a complex web of permits, delays, endless processes, and escalating fees. Everybody is well intentioned, but as we have grown the silos and grown the kingdoms of bureaucracy, we have become a less productive province as a result. But we're turning this around by elevating the voices of workers, by ensuring that training better reflects the needs of employers and better equips a resilient workforce to respond to ever-changing technology—and to ensure the greatest strength of Ontario, the people, are supported as Ontario moves forward in an increasingly interconnected global economy.

The measures we've introduced today will ensure Ontario remains the best place to live, work and raise a family.

0910

The group of people I talked about today—I want to start with our front-line heroes, especially our firefighters, including municipal and wildland firefighters. We have been working on incremental changes. That is why we do these Working for Workers bills multiple times. Previous governments could have done that. They could have articulated the priority of workers by having a vessel to introduce legislation multiple times a year—they didn't; we did. Through these incremental changes, we have transformed how firefighters are supported in Ontario. We have never seen this sort of transformative work—and I want to thank them for the work that they do.

The legislative changes that I want to zero in on that we are making in this bill are supporting firefighters with Workplace Safety and Insurance Board coverage for colorectal cancer and kidney cancer. For primary-site kidney cancer, we propose to reduce the length of duration of service from 20 to 10 years—and for colorectal cancer, remove the requirement that the diagnosis must be made before the age of 61. Simply put, firefighters are four times more likely to receive a cancer diagnosis because of the occupational exposures, fighting fires on a day-to-day basis. They deserve, and their families deserve, to know they are supported.

This story is best underscored through a local constituent of mine, Ric Ash, who has become a good friend. Ric has served our community, gives back to our community in many ways. When I spoke with him about his experience as a firefighter, at the crux of the issue—for him, it boiled down to wanting to know his family would be supported when he received his cancer diagnosis because of occupational exposures, as a result of being a firefighter.

For too many years, Ontario lagged in Canada; it didn't lead. Today, we are leading. Today, other provinces are saying to us, as we gather, as provincial labour ministers, "Ontario, slow down." Premier Ford and I say no. We're not slowing down, and we're not apologizing for leading Canada. And we are glad to see other provinces follow our lead.

It is stories like Ric's; it's stories like other firefighters—Jeff Briggs, who works for Cobourg fire. Jeff supports Cobourg firefighters but also has extended a hand to volunteer firefighters, to help them with WSIB supports. It's a brotherhood, a sisterhood that unites firefighters across Northumberland county. They want to know that as they put their lives on the line, they will be supported by a government that cares for them and values their service.

That's what this government, under Premier Ford's leadership, is doing through this bill—making sure our firefighters are supported. If passed, these proposals will ensure these heroes and their families are looked after.

I want to move on now to talk a bit about supporting families through employment service leaves. We need to support families during every step of their journey, to make sure they have the time they need to concentrate on what's important. No one should have to choose between being a worker or a parent. That's why we're proposing a new 16-week, job-protected leave for adoptive and surrogacy parents under the Employment Standards Act. This new leave would align with upcoming federal employment insurance benefits for adoptive and surrogacy parents, like Zane and Baden Colt. We saw Scottie—cutest child I think I've seen in ages, and that includes the incredible children of friends of mine. It's just such a great experience to meet their children and to see the impact that they've had on their lives.

We shouldn't have a two-tier class system when it comes to being parents. Recognizing adoptive and surrogacy parents, giving them the same employment insurance leave provisions as other Ontarians, isn't just the right thing to do; it's the fair thing to do, and it recognizes that no one should have to choose between being a worker or a parent. This bill supports those parents, recognizing that families come in all shapes and sizes and in different ways. So we appreciate their voices—the Colts' voices, who have been reflected in this piece of legislation.

We also want to ensure the well-being of Ontarians who face episodic illnesses, to focus on what's important to them, and that is battling a diagnosis that will forever change their lives, like multiple sclerosis, like Crohn's and ulcerative colitis. That's why we are introducing 27-week job-protected leave, so that people don't need to worry

about their jobs when they're battling these episodic conditions. Again, I want to tie this back to the stories. These stories are like yarn woven together—forms this legislation. The stories of the multiple sclerosis advocates I've met and the Crohn's and ulcerative colitis advocates I've met—we all have family members, loved ones, who we've seen battle episodic illnesses. Flare-ups can be cruel and unkind and can shatter one's dignity. They deserve to know that as they deal with those very personal challenges, their job is not also on the line. Ensuring that we protect their job through these provisions means they can focus on getting better and looking after themselves.

Interjection.

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you. I appreciate that. I'm going to work on getting a round of applause from everyone, hopefully.

I think everyone here recognizes they've known someone with an episodic illness. Focusing on getting better, focusing on their health—I do believe that when you're focusing on getting better, when we reduce illnesses in the workplace, when we reduce leave because of illness, we can ensure a more productive economy, and I want to tie this back to measures in this bill to ensure a more productive workforce.

Next, this leads me to personal protective equipment. This is something that's so important to me, as labour minister. I've always said—and underscored by the words of Jeff Parnell, head of the Power Workers' Union, who I met yesterday. Jeff said, "We just can't produce the power we need leaving 50% of our workforce behind." I smiled, because I've often said that we can't build the things we want to build in this province leaving 50% of the workforce behind. So we've put in place measures that I thought, honestly, were already in place. Ensuring properly fitted personal protective equipment, you'd think, is common sense, but sometimes common sense isn't all that common when it comes to politics. By ensuring men and women are protected—all body types, especially for women—with properly fitting PPE in all job places, we can help ensure we're building a stronger Ontario.

As I go to the pre-apprenticeship courses with you—think back to your days as a trustee, Speaker. Think to our time at Judith Nyman, and the young women we've seen, whose handshakes—if those handshakes could tell me their destiny and their purpose in life. Boy, was I impressed, and boy, did I have a clarion vision of where they were going in the trades. These are young women who deserve to have all sorts of job offerings. We don't want to close doors to young women before they even open.

We know our job sites are safer than they were decades ago, and continuing to take steps to ensure that means ensuring properly protective equipment—and so we've implemented that in our Occupational Health and Safety Act.

In fact, according to a 2022 report by the Canadian Standards Association—big shout-out to the CSA team, who were at my Empire Club speech. I had a great opportunity to speak with all of them, and I appreciate the work they do to build consensus around standards that keep workers safe in the province of Ontario. Speaker, 50% of women in their survey said that their PPE didn't fit properly; 43% said it's uncomfortable to wear—imagine coveralls with the crotch down to your knees; imagine gloves that don't fit; imagine a hard hat that moves around on your head, falling off—58% said they use PPE that's the wrong size.

0920

This is absolutely not acceptable—and that's why we're proposing to further expand the explicit requirement to all sectors by enshrining it in legislation, growing the opportunities for women in the skilled trades, building a stronger Ontario. This is a first-in-Canada measure, and we're proud to do this. But we're not stopping there.

We're ensuring a first in Canada by ensuring that we have the same standards for washrooms on Bay Street—and bringing it to Main Street. I know our labour critic in the New Democratic Party has spoken at length about this. I want to say that as we move through the Working for Workers bills, one through six, to make it better, I have heard the stories that he has heard about properly ensuring running water in washrooms, ensuring that those washrooms, and I don't dispute it—that do exist today on job sites. A worker came up to me on the weekend and said the Johnny on the Spot—and yes, it's nice to have standards and it's nice to ensure it's clean. I think that member and I would agree. Let's not undermine the importance of having those standards—but it's still a Johnny on the Spot. So we have more work to do, and I acknowledge that. But I think this is an important step, a first-in-Canada step. And I think that when we have those standards in place, we can continue to meet—I have a meeting coming up with a new made-in-Ontario solution for portable washrooms. I look forward to continuing to lead Canada in challenging our job sites to do better for workers. Again, I think when we do this, we ensure a more productive workforce.

These standards on washrooms are an important step. We've heard from tradeswomen, especially, that it ensures a more productive workplace for them. We've built on requirements that have ensured washrooms for women on job sites. This is important, and we've listened to those workers.

Speaker, I want to move on to speak a bit about worker safety. We know that there are bad actors on the job sites, so under the Occupational Health and Safety Act—I want to give a shout-out to the Steelworkers union—we're proposing mandatory minimums for those who don't learn a lesson. When you have a labour inspector on your job site in a proactive inspection—which are up under this government—they take an education-first approach. If you don't learn the first time, you should learn the second time—I've heard cases of sometimes three times. But after that, when we see a disaster, when we see a workplace injury after multiple attempts to rectify the situation, that's when you have to act, and that's when you have to draw a line and say to that employer, "I'm sorry. It's not okay."

Dare we get to a place where there's a workplace fatality—I think we can all agree that one fatality is a fatality too many. There are workplace accidents, but there are also workplace fatalities as a result of negligence on behalf of the employer. When I hear stories of an employer that has not seen one, two, but three fatalities in the span of 22 months, that is so unacceptable. That is wrong in this Ontario that we all call home. That's why we're saying to a judiciary that gives that employer a slap on the wrist, "You have to do better"—and this message is to all the judges. This place sets laws—they enforce it. So we're introducing tough mandatory minimums on employers that do not learn that the protection of their workers and their health and safety is paramount.

Speaker, I also want to thank our Chief Prevention Officer. We've taken steps to expand and clarify the powers of the Chief Prevention Officer, including oversight required on safety training; the ability to formally receive advice from the remarkable work done by our section work—done by our section 21 committees; the ability to collect and access occupational health and safety data, to measure outcomes and inform future prevention strategies. All of this is streamlining the work of our Chief Prevention Officer, to make our workplaces safer, to formalize recommendations from our section 21 committees and to really ensure that the work they do matters. I want to thank Dr. Moody for the work that he does each and every day and for the team who supports Dr. Moody at MLITSD.

Speaker, I have spoken at length on cracking down on immigration scams, so I won't speak about that today.

I want to close by talking about growing Ontario's workforce. We need more workers to realize the 1.5 million homes and the commitment we've made. We know one in three journeypersons are retiring. I just want to zero in on that. These are journeypersons with a remarkable skill set, with knowledge. We all know small contractors in our community—one-, two- or three-person shops—that incredible knowledge that has been accumulated over 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years in a community. We have to ensure that we are training the next generation of workers through valuable apprenticeships.

We've ensured that not only are we proclaiming April 2 as the in-force date for our skilled trades act—and it will transfer responsibility for certain functions under the act from the minister to Skilled Trades Ontario—but we're going to support them in their mandate.

I want to thank the member for Scarborough for the work he has done for skilled trades and really underscoring the important role that skilled trades play in Ontario.

Under Premier Ford's leadership, we've been working hard to put more money back in the pockets of families and businesses.

Growing Ontario's workforce means removing barriers for young men and women to enter the trades.

I want to talk about the previous government's tax on the trades. Liberals had no problem—a complex Tokyo subway system process to become a skilled tradesman or woman. Not only did they cut doctor spots, nursing spots, but then they made it complex and hard for young men or women to enter the trades. We've slashed those barriers. We've wound down OCOT, which they allowed to become a turf-war agency, where we saw scope of practice fought within an agency of this government. We've removed the \$150 exam fee. We've ended the Liberals' Kathleen Wynne-Bonnie Crombie tax on the trades, and we're saving each apprentice over \$330.

We're putting more money back in apprentices' pockets, and we're distributing money back to employers—safe employers. We're supporting safe employers with safety plans. We're putting more money back into health and safety plans, to help small employers, in particular, ensure a safe workplace. We're removing the costs and the barriers and that web to become a tradesman or tradeswoman by expanding the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program; expanding the number of preapprenticeship programs; ensuring we're investing in union training halls, especially ignored by previous governments; and removing fiscal barriers that make it harder to enter the trades.

To do that, we will build a stronger Ontario. I'm excited for the years ahead. Our best days are yet to come. Under Premier Ford, we're going to support the men and women who are going to make it happen.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the minister for his debate on Working for Workers Six. I pointed out a couple of times that it's the eighth labour bill, but in the spirit of Christmas, I'm not going to go into that this time.

Also, I want to thank everyone here today and everyone who was here last night for passing the Injured Workers Day bill last night. It was very meaningful. We had two guests in the gallery, and it really meant a lot to them, as people who are advocating for injured workers and as injured workers themselves. I know it's going to be important across the community. I was surprised to find out that Injured Workers Day wasn't an official day. Last year, when I tabled it, it was right before the 40th anniversary—it will be nice, for the 41st, that it be officially recognized here in Ontario.

The minister talked a lot about the presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters. During second reading of the bill, I read a statement from OPSEU, which represents a lot of the wildland firefighters, saying that they felt that it didn't apply to them. I've received literature, and it's back and forth, it isn't 100% clear, but in the spirit of Christmas, let's assume that it is—hopefully it is for all of those members, and I'm sure that if it isn't, we'll be hearing about this loud and clear in the new year. But I feel optimistic that this cancer coverage is going to cover those wildland firefighters, as well, because I know the minister wants to ensure that workers are taken care of and aren't harmed.

0930

Briefly, in his remarks, the minister talked about the washrooms. I've advocated for a more permanent structure. I've talked about how porta-potties aren't that exciting for people—they might sound like it if you've never had to use one, but they aren't. I'm very hopeful about his ideas to look at a more permanent solution. Washroom trailers were possible—and I think that's good. It's good to go into the new year with some hope.

I did want to mention that there has been a lot of conversation over the last little while about the importance of having clean, inspected porta-potty washrooms on construction sites. I was at a rally for injured workers earlier this week, and a woman tradesperson from IBEW told me, "This isn't happening on our job sites." She'll be sharing more information with me, and I'll pass it along to the minister, because I know that it's a platform that has been incrementally discussed in several of these bills—the importance of having these clean washrooms, and washrooms specifically for women. If it's not happening and we want to attract women to the trades field or keep women who are already in the trades field there and feeling like it's valuable, we have to address this. So it's disheartening when I hear from a member from IBEW, the electrical workers, that—it's interesting; as I think of the acronym, it's the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, IBEW, and I'm speaking to a female member of that union. That's how much the shift has come with blue-collar jobs. I come out of mining myself, and I know, in mining—very often, I'll say, "the boys" at work. When I was hired at a smelter with more than 500 people working there, there were four women. The world is changing; it's good that is, and we need to be up with the times.

And I congratulate the minister for having a focus on women's PPE. I think that's important as well.

The minister spoke a lot about the positive things in the bill, and we're very aligned on the positive things. But my frustration with the Working for Workers bills has been that there's typically something really good—think of Christmas. There's a really good gift that you're excited about—I think that the wildland firefighters is a good example of that, or the firefighter compensation—then there are a couple of things that are fine, they're nice to have, like the stocking presents, and then there's the orange. I talked about this last time—where there are a lot of parts of the bill where legislation already existed or it sounded really good. You're excited, you reach in there and you feel something, and it's the orange. You can't argue against an orange. It turns out to be, "We're doubling the maximum fine," but when you look at it—well, the maximum fine was never handed out in the past anyway.

During the previous debate, I talked about a lot of the issues that I would like to see in these bills, to address, to tackle, workers, because I feel like, aside from the Christmas gift item, aside from the main ones that you point at—these are definitely good—a lot of these are colouring on the edges. They're going to be helpful to people—except for the unfunded liability for injured workers, which I hope to get into. They will be helpful, but they're not tackling things that the majority of workers are facing today.

Workers are struggling right now with housing. The downfall, I believe, of the Liberal government was the fact that when they sold off Hydro One and the price of electricity began to skyrocket, what you heard very often from workers was that they had to choose between heating and eating. What we're seeing now is, that hasn't changed

very much. But now it's about housing; it's about choosing—do you have a safe place to live? Do you have an affordable place to live? Do you have anywhere to live? More and more, workers are struggling with this.

I think that's why every year, for the last seven years, the Feed Ontario report about food banks has told us that the number of workers going to food banks continues to climb. In the last report that we just received—it's in my desk; I can't take it out, because that would be considered a prop—it's saying that one in four workers are going to food banks. A colleague from the Conservative Party said, "Well, you know how people are when things are free. If it's going to be free, they're going to go get it. If you had a little thing in the park and you were giving out free chips, people will show up and try to fill their backpacks with chips." That is true. But let's not delude ourselves into thinking people that are going to food banks because it's free. There might be a very small part of the population who is doing this, but I think it is minuscule; it's incredibly tiny. The reality is that people are going to food banks because they have no money in their pockets. And it is embarrassing to not see, in a Working for Workers bill—number 6—anything to address this for people. The number keeps climbing every year. It started under the Liberals. It was getting bad under the Liberals, but, honestly, it has gotten worse under the Conservatives.

We're more than half a decade into the Conservative government. I remember, when we ran against the Liberals, our party's slogan was "Change for the Better." The people of Ontario, as a majority, chose the Conservatives instead of a change for better. I would argue, and I think that the data is showing it, that perhaps they didn't vote for a change for the better—not our party, specifically. But they hoped that they were going to provide something better, and it has gotten worse and more difficult.

And if you're measuring on a pass/fail, with people working full-time going to food banks, you are failing as government. That's the reality.

I want to get into housing, for example. A bare-minimum need for a worker is safe, affordable housing. It just makes sense. It's the sort of thing, as kids, that we took for granted. Some people lived in an apartment, some people had a condo, some people had a house, some people lived on a farm—all different aspects. As kids, I think we expected that everyone lived somewhere, especially if you had a job—that if you went to work 40 hours a week, you got your food, you got your utilities, you got your housing, and you probably had a couple of bucks left in your pocket that maybe you could put into savings for your kids' future, or take them to the movies, or just have change rolling around. That's not the reality anymore. That's a falsehood that has been given to the people of Ontario. And they are desperate. We are hearing this all the time. I don't know if my colleagues from the other parties—maybe they are not going to the constituency offices or not listening to the messages or emails. But I have to tell you, it's loud and clear. We have been sharing those messages, as New Democrats, with the government. People are struggling.

A phrase I heard last week has been stuck in my head for a while. This is from somebody who makes a decent wage, someone who would be on the sunshine list. They told me, "I feel like I'm treading water. I'm constantly treading water, and every day, I'm slipping farther away from the shore. Sooner or later, I'm not going to be able to make ends meet anymore." That's someone on the sunshine list—more than \$100,000—who feels like they cannot make ends meet, who feels like they are drifting away from the shore.

So imagine minimum wage workers. Imagine workers who aren't on that sunshine list. Imagine workers who make \$50k, \$40k, \$30k. Imagine seniors, who are making \$12,000—\$1,000 a month. Imagine people on OW and ODSP, who are hovering around there—about a thousand bucks a month. They are not even treading water. They are drowning, and their hand is up, and instead of grabbing their hand—high-five from the Conservative government. We need to address this.

Think about what a home means to people. It means a warm bed; it means a hot shower—a place where you can prepare a meal, a place where you can care for your family, a place where you can host your friends. At the very minimum, it means a shelter from the environment. I'm from northern Ontario. I've got to tell you, it was cold today, walking to work. I've got a thick down jacket, and I was wearing sweaters underneath it. It was cold. And we are not providing affordable shelter for people who are working.

Right now, housing is a real barrier. So when we talk about this Working for Workers bill, I'm wondering, in six bills, why aren't we focusing on workers who can't afford to live where they work because it's too expensive to be nearby? That poses other challenges, because now transportation—if you're in the north, you probably don't have public transit, so that means you need to own a car; or, if you live in the north and you can't afford to live close to where most of the work is, you're limited to where you can work because you can't afford a car, so you've got to rely on who can drop you off or how far you can walk or if you can ride a bike and all these other challenges.

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How come this bill and the previous five Working for Workers bills aren't talking about workers who are working two or three jobs to pay the bills? Why aren't they talking about gig workers, who are being exploited by companies that are calling them contractors? After taxes, these rideshare drivers, the people who are picking you up with Lyft and Uber—they're making four bucks an hour. Instead of addressing it, one of these Working for Workers bills enshrined that into law, that that was okay. That's not working for workers; it's working against them.

Why aren't we talking about workers who can't afford to pay their rent or pay their mortgage and eat, and have to go to food banks, or, even more embarrassingly, can't afford child care, so when they go to the food banks, they have to bring their kids? They don't even have the dignity of hiding that from their kids, so their kids can feel like there's a brighter future for them.

What about workers who are unable to come to work because their housing is precarious? What about the workers who get fired from their jobs because they're sleeping rough or they're couch-surfing? They don't have a place to lay their head at night, or they don't have a place to shower, to clean themselves, to brush their teeth—just basic human dignity. What about people who can't find a job because of these things?

The Premier, at one point, talked about the encampments—the encampments that are caused by Conservative government policies. The Premier, at one point, said, “Get off your A, asterisk, asterisk”—because I can't say that word—“and find a job.” Most of those workers—they're homeless now because they had a job and couldn't afford it. A lot of those workers were in those good-paying trades jobs and got injured; WSIB failed them. Instead of providing the funding so they could stay on their feet, they denied and refused, and they had to fight back and fight back. And instead of having that money go to them, the Conservative government, for the third time—first under Harris, twice under this Premier—has said, “Oh, there's unfunded liability; let's give it back to the employers.” That unfunded liability was created by saying no to workers who are injured. As much as I'm on board with bringing people into good-paying, blue-collar jobs, if we are not taking care of them when they're injured, if we're refusing them and rewarding the employers that are allowing them to be injured—you've lost the thread, and you don't have workers' backs.

It is difficult, if you're living rough, to find a job; it is difficult if you're not able to shower and brush your teeth and shave; it is difficult if you can't afford a haircut. It is difficult to get a job when they ask for your address and you say, “I live in the park behind Queen's Park. I live in one of the two tents that exist right now”—or in Sudbury, “Oh, I used to live in Memorial Park, but they removed that encampment. Now I live in the bushes. It's even less safe, because I'm more vulnerable out there. But at least I'm out of sight and people don't have to look at me. I guess that's what's good for the public.”

Instead of pushing people out of encampments, we should be providing homes.

When the Conservative government was talking about consumption treatment centres and removing the funding for them—we lived that already in Sudbury. We never got a penny from this government for them. We saved lives, based on local donors in the municipality ponying up—which should be a provincial expense. When they talked about removing these—they forgot that these are our brothers and sisters, our parents, our kids; they forgot the family that loves them and left them behind. But we remember them, and we care about them.

The reality is, life is hard. It was getting hard under the Liberals, and that is why they went from majority government to independents—just for anyone watching, that means you don't have enough members to actually be recognized in here as a party. They still are parties; they're Liberals and Greens—there are just not enough members elected to be recognized as a party. But going from a majority to independents—people were pretty angry; people felt like their life wasn't getting better.

The people of Ontario now are looking at the Conservative government and saying, “Well, you were supposed to fix this, but it's six years, more than half a decade, and it keeps getting worse. Why does it keep getting harder under the Conservatives? How did you find over \$2 billion to build a luxury spa in downtown Toronto? And why are you making my household pay 400 bucks?” Every household in Ontario, 400 bucks—and you can have a luxury spa?

I've got to tell you, I come out of mining. Not a lot of guys in the mines are going to a luxury spa in Toronto. In fact, a lot of people where I live are very frustrated, coming to Toronto. They like to see the tourist stuff. They like the people. But quite frankly, they feel like politicians here don't understand what it's like to be in the north.

The role of the government is to make people's life easier, to remove roadblocks. I know the Conservatives understand this because they always talk about these red tape bills and that they need to cut the red tape and make it smoother, but they don't see it when it comes to workers, and they need to. They should be addressing housing. They should be addressing affordability.

In my riding, there's an apartment, 20 Cypress, and they have a terrible landlord. This landlord has proactively been trying to kick out the tenants. Literally, he has been freezing them out of the building. Last winter, the tenants in this building had no heat for four months. It was probably longer than that, but the weather was mild so they didn't notice until November. In November, December, January and February, the tenants at 20 Cypress had no heat at all—none. The landlord was absent. We couldn't track him down. We couldn't find him. He was hiding. He didn't live in Sudbury. We're getting a lot more of those—foreign people buying properties. In Sudbury, it used to be that you'd live next door to your landlord. Even the bigger landlords who owned apartment buildings—Zulich, we all know where he lives. We see him all the time at Wolves games and stuff. But we're getting more and more of these investors from long away, and they don't see us as community; they see renters as people to be exploited. These tenants, for four months, had no heat. Instead of fixing the problem, the landlord hid from us, from the municipality, from bylaw. Instead of fixing the problem, the landlord started asking the tenants to just move out—"There's no heat. Why would you stay there? Just get out." When they wouldn't move out, he said, "How much money could I give you? I'll give you cash." What he wanted to do was freeze them out, or bribe them out, or get them out so he could raise the rent. And it might have worked. When I was in my twenties, where you wanted to live in Sudbury was a difference of 50 bucks—maybe 100 bucks. But because rent is so unaffordable, they had to live in a place with a bad landlord, with no heat in a Sudbury winter.

Guess what's happening this fall? Last spring, we tracked him down. The municipality, the bylaw, forced him to make the repairs. He said, "Oh, I can't make the repairs. The ground is frozen. I've got to dig up the ground." He needed an extension. This fall, tenants were calling me, saying, "We still have no heat. He didn't do the repairs." Yesterday, a resident's pipes burst because of the cold, and now she has no heat and she has no water. Did the landlord come rushing in in response? No. Is there anything in the Working for Workers bills or any of the bills the Conservatives have tabled in the short amount of time that we're sitting here that's going to help these people? No.

Even starting back to 2018—when the Conservative government was elected, one of the first things they did is, they said, "We're going to remove rent control on all apartments after 2018—so the sky's the limit. We're going to look the other way when it comes to people being rent-evicted, renovicted." The idea, the concept, makes sense. You're doing major renovations, fixing your building and ripping everything down; you've got to replace all the wiring because it's 50 years old; you've got to displace those workers, and now the building becomes—major renovations—worth more rent. The reality, especially for these large conglomerates that are buying up buildings, is, they evict everybody for major renovations. They keep the place empty for three or four months, and their major renovation is paint and windows. I helped my parents change the windows in their house. We didn't have to kick them out. We did it in an afternoon. But this is what they're allowed to do, and the Conservative government looks the other way. They don't care. I don't know why they don't care.

These tenants from Cypress are not the only ones. Last week, in my riding, I heard again from seniors in a seniors' building, Place Nolin. They haven't had an elevator since June. These are seniors with mobility issues in an apartment building with no elevator. God forbid there's ever a fire or emergency, because I don't know how we're going to get them out there. But just think of day-to-day, as a senior. How do you get your groceries and food? How do you get outside when there's no elevator and you have mobility issues? You have to wait for someone to carry you or help you down the stairs, if you even have the energy to do it. But that's okay—they're not held accountable. Seniors go to doctors a lot, if they can find a doctor. Often, they're going to walk-in clinics. But if you have mobility issues and you can't make it down the stairs, good luck.

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Tenants like these and those at Cypress are feeling left behind by this government, which claims to be working for workers. They want bad landlords—there are some good landlords out there; I'm adamant about it—to be addressed. They want this to be taken care of. The Conservative government passes the buck to the municipalities and ignores them and does this—I call this the Conservative coat of arms. It's everyone's fault but their own. There's no accountability. Because there's no rent control, because of renovictions, because the Conservative government is focused on wealthy, well-connected donors and not on workers and their affordability crisis, they don't have laws and protections for those tenants, and they end up homeless; they end up terrified and trapped in their own house. I'm not saying that the Working for Workers bills don't have good things in them; they do, and I always compliment them, and I would in this case, but it was time-allocated, so we don't even have the full amount of time—it never went to committee for feedback; it has really been shrunk.

So I'm focusing on, I think, the thing most people would like for Christmas, and that's a place they can afford to live. Colouring around the edges with little improvements is just not enough.

Vanessa is one of the tenants at 20 Cypress, and she has been advocating for months to resolve her housing issues. The landlord owes her money. One of the reasons he owes money—there's a variety of reasons—is that the tenants had to buy little space heaters so they didn't freeze to death. But the landlord is not paying the money back—the Landlord and Tenant Board said he has to, but he's not going to. It's interesting how the Landlord and Tenant Board can evict tenants like that—but when you have a bad landlord who makes the other landlords look bad, they drag their feet and they can't get it done. This landlord is still asking people, “What if I give you some cash? Would you just move out?”—because he wants to make it more expensive. They have tenants with health and safety as a risk. Imagine not having running water, not having heat. They're stressed out, and they're losing sleep. They're terrified they're going to lose their house. They're terrified they're going to come home and some other weird thing is going to happen. They feel like they have no recourse, because there's no rent control, there's no enforcement—there's no one ensuring the landlord provides his responsibilities.

This landlord—I keep talking about this one, because he's a bad example and the bad actor that I hear about from the Conservatives. He's reoffending on a regular basis, but it's the tenants who get punished.

This isn't new, because every one of my colleagues in the NDP has brought this up time and time again, and it is like waves rushing on rock, because the Conservative government is unmoved and they don't listen. Frankly, I don't think they care about workers—they don't care that they're being kicked out of their houses, and loss. It's a shame.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I don't know if I have to, but I'll be splitting my time with the member from Kitchener Centre, and I'll be quick.

The member from Mississauga–Lakeshore reminded me that the Premier's carbon tax, the industrial emitters tax, will be going up on January 1, and I thank him for reminding me of that. But that's not what we're here to debate.

We're here to debate—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Merry Christmas, everybody.

We're here to debate Working for Workers. I think this is Working for Workers Six or seven or eight—I'm not sure—or 6.1.

Hon. Michael Parsa: It's six.

**Mr. John Fraser: Okay. We're going to support this bill.**

I want to give you Working for Workers Act Seven—and the reason I say “seven” is because there's a bill that has been before this House which is about WSIB coverage for workers in residential care settings. What that means is, there are workers in this province—personal support workers, developmental service workers and youth workers, people who are working in residential settings. That could be a retirement home. It could be a group home. It could be a day program for developmental services that's housed inside a residential care facility. If that facility—like, a long-term care facility—is owned by the province or funded by the province, you're covered by WSIB. But the PSWs in retirement homes, who are essentially doing the same kind of work, are not covered. What that means is, many of them work two jobs. They might have coverage through a workplace insurance program, but they're not going to be covered in both jobs—they will be if they're under WSIB. Most of these workers are women. Most of them are low-wage. So there's a basic inequity there, where people doing the same work have different coverages.

I don't understand why we haven't done that yet. I've introduced this bill. It's a private member's bill that I introduced back in 2017—I think I'm on my fourth minister, including one of our own. I have put the bill forward five times, and I've debated it three times. That's how important it is. I have had assurances from almost every labour minister that they're going to do it. I talked to the folks at WSIB when they did the rate review, and they said, “Yes, yes, we're going to do it. We've just got to get through this rate review.” Well, by my count, we're going to be eight years in.

I'm just simply asking the Minister of Labour if he will do what he said and what his colleagues have said, and provide WSIB coverage for workers in residential settings—those personal support workers, those developmental service workers and those youth workers who are not covered and are at risk, again, because many of them work more than one job. That's my pitch this morning. That should be Working for Workers Act Seven, so I don't have to introduce it again. The government can introduce it this spring, and we can get it passed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I want to thank the constituents of Kitchener Centre. It's an honour to have served them for over a year. I go to work every day, and I come with an open heart and an open mind, ready to listen. The constituents of Kitchener Centre are my boss, and it's my goal to be a voice for them here today.

One thing I remember is a group of new immigrants from Ukraine. They were working at a local business called Dutchie's, and they hadn't been paid. Here are folks who have fled war; they've come to my community, they work in our grocery store to make sure that we have affordable food on our table, but they have been robbed of their wages. The thing that was most alarming was, this wasn't the first time that this bad-acting business owner had robbed people of their wages. In fact, when Waterloo Region Community Legal Services went on a digging spree, they found that the business owner owed hundreds of thousands of dollars in stolen wages and had been charged tens of times, yet he continued operating his business and continued stealing wages. They said that the folks from India didn't feel empowered to speak up, and they didn't want to go forward to make complaints against their boss because they were worried about their immigration status.

Too often, we see wages being robbed from people who maybe don't speak very good English, are new immigrants or are vulnerable in many ways. So I was so proud of these Ukrainian newcomers who came to my office to speak up. They recently had a decision made, and the owner was found guilty again, but he continues operating to this day, going home to his house, to his bed, without paying the price.

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So when we talk about Working for Workers, I hope that in number 7, this government will find a way to add some teeth. We need a way to hold these bad-acting gougers, I'll say, accountable for wage theft. We have \$60 million in this province of unpaid wages. So when we want to get tough on crime, let's think about people who are struggling to pay their bills, struggling to pay their rent, and ensure that when they go to work, they know that they can get paid. It is really this gouging that is a big problem. And I thank the member from Sudbury for talking about the gouging that happens in housing. Too often, we see these bad actors not being held accountable.

I call on this government, whether it's a bad-acting immigration consultant—thank you for holding them accountable and putting in some measures—bad-acting employers that are robbing their employees of their wages, or a bad-acting landlord who is harassing people and making their lives difficult. I urge you to add teeth to these tribunals. Add a mechanism to reclaim some of these lost wages and pay for the damages that people experience. The gouging has to stop, and we have to put people's well-being over those profits.

I thank the government for investing in leaves. We see people who need time with their kids. We see people who are sick and want to not lose their jobs. So I'm grateful to the government for that.

I'm grateful for their investment in the trades. We know that this is an area where we have major recruitment and retention issues. So thank you for that.

I would like to also see a recruitment and retention strategy for ECEs. Because of the wage issues that they experience, we don't have enough staff to take care of those babies. When people have their leaves and then they have to go back to work, they're left high and dry. I hear from my constituents often that they're out of luck when it comes time to go back to work, because there are no child care spaces in my riding. We're a child care desert. And they are waiting.

Finally, I'd like to talk about how we can take care of workers' well-being. We need this fairness. A lot of our low- and middle-income workers are feeling abandoned by this government. They're struggling—I think it's 50% of Ontarians are struggling to get by and they live paycheque to paycheque. It's so important that we don't abandon the vast majority of our province, and ensure that everybody has a roof and food. When I go to a door, I am always grateful when people say, "No, I'm good." I say, "Good. You have a roof and food." My job is to serve, so that all the people in Ontario have a roof and food.

In my community, we've had a doubling of homelessness; we've had a doubling of people using the food bank—so that's people without a roof and food, and it breaks my heart. I live close to the most famous encampment in all of Canada. We went to the Supreme Court, and they said, "You cannot evict those people because you have nowhere for them to go." My shelter beds are full; we don't have any space. And November comes at the same time every year. It's cold out there, and I feel for those folks who live near me, who are just trying to survive. We can do better.

In my community, for every affordable home we build, we lose 39 in the private sector, often because of these illegal renovictions, illegal demovictions. When I go to the biggest shelter in my riding—we call it the Schwaben Club. It used to be where we celebrated Oktoberfest. Now it's full of seniors and their walkers.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I've been there.

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I know. Me too. I don't remember all of them.

Now it's full of seniors and their walkers and these newcomers who fled Ukraine. My dad goes to the park and he sees a young lady who left her home, back home—she has a master's in psychology, and she's living at the Schwaben Club, because there is nowhere to live in my community. We have a 0% vacancy rate of affordable housing, and that's not okay.

I urge this government not only to build affordable housing—but that takes a long time and a lot of money. The Minister of Agriculture knows how long it takes and how much money it takes. We need to protect the affordable rentals in our community right now.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 10, 2024, I'm now required to put the question.

Mr. Piccini has moved third reading of Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

Those in favour, please say "aye"

Those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

Third reading vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Orders of the day? I recognize the House leader.

Mr. Steve Clark: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): There being no further business, we stand recessed until 10:15.

The House recessed from 1005 to 1015.

Working for Workers Six Act, 2024 / Loi de 2024 visant à œuvrer pour les travailleurs, six

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

**Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024**

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1206 to 1207.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On December 12, 2024, Mr. Piccini moved third reading of Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes (LAL: unanimous)

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 97; the nays are 0.**

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

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

Third reading agreed to.

**December 12, 2024**

**Working for Workers Six Act, 2024**

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

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1206 to 1207.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On December 12, 2024, Mr. Piccini moved third reading of Bill 229, An Act to enact the Skilled Trades Week Act, 2024 and to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes (LAL: Unanimous)

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

**The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 97; the nays are 0.**

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

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

Third reading agreed to.

**L.A. Liversidge**  
**December 13, 2024**