

MEDIA EVENT: ONTARIO'S CABINET MINISTERS DISCUSS MUNICIPAL ISSUES AT THE AMO MINISTERS' FORUM

August 20, 2024

Time/Location:

3:40 p.m. / Ottawa, Ontario

Speakers:

Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General

Graham McGregor, Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform

Prabmeet Sarkaria, Minister of Transportation

Mike Harris, Minister of Red Tape Reduction

Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services

Jill Dunlop, Minister of Education

Stephen Lecce, Minister of Energy and Electrification

Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance

Doug Downey, Attorney General

Greg Rickford, Minister of Northern Development and Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation

Highlights:

Asked by the City of Kitchener if the government commit to both bringing all outstanding regulations in the Helping Homebuyers, Protecting Tenants Act (Bill 97) into force, and commit to a review of the Residential Tenancies Act, Minister Calandra stated that he first wants to work with Minister Downey on bringing “balance” back to the Landlord and Tenant Board, then get more housing (especially purpose built rentals) built, and then look at how best to protect both tenants and landlords.

Asked by the Village of Casselman when the government will shift the burden of enforcing the keeping of dangerous and exotic animals from municipalities to the province, Minister Kerzner stated that the province will continue to explore this issue, and has passed both the PAWS and the PUPS Acts, which are strong pieces of animal welfare legislation that enables animal welfare inspectors throughout the province.

Asked by the City of Brampton what they can expect from the newly appointed Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform, Associate Minister McGregor stated that the status quo isn't working, and that the government has enabled 2,000 more police graduates, up from 1,400. He stated that the federal government needs to get involved in bringing real change, and stated: “...(I'm) day two on the job. You'll be

hearing more from me soon. And, don't worry, the bad guys will, hear from me soon as well.”

Asked by the Municipality of Frontenac Islands if the government will enable the dual ferry system from 2011 for Wolfe Island to reduce existing wait times for the new Wolfe Islander ferry, Minister Sarkaria stated that the new ferry accommodates 50% more capacity, and the government will continue to monitor the progress and continue to work with the municipality and residents.

Asked by the City of Waterloo what the government is doing to reduce red tape for municipalities that are applying for grants like the Housing Enabling Water System Fund, Minister Harris stated that the government is looking at ways to streamline the grant writing process and that “it’s going to be coming at some point”. He stated that the government has reduced the regulatory burden by \$1.2 billion through red tape reduction packages since 2018, and that a new legislative package is coming this Fall.

Asked by the City of Kenora what the government is doing to ensure that municipalities’ community safety plans are in line with provincial initiatives, and that municipalities have a cohesive approach to addressing the challenges outside of their jurisdiction, both Minister Kerzner and Minister Parsa stated that the government wants to work with municipalities to find out what part of their particular community safety plan the government can assist with by providing localized grants or funding mechanisms. Minister Kerzner noted that Kenora, as an example, has received funding support for the OPP.

Asked by the Township of South Glengarry if the government would continue to protect rural and Northern Ontario schools if the province-wide moratorium on school closures is lifted, Minister Dunlop stated that as the new Minister of Education her current priority is maintaining stability in the sector, and is maintaining the moratorium on school closures. She reminded municipalities and school boards that proposals for capital projects funding are due September 16th.

Asked by both the City of Pickering and Township of Mcnab/Braeside, in response to increased inflammatory rhetoric and threats on council, when the province will bring municipal code of conduct legislation, Minister Calandra stated that the province is not waiting for more evidence of the need for legislation, and has asked the Integrity Commissioner to bring recommendations. He stated: “I want to ensure... that whatever we bring forward is able to stand the first test. And that first test will ultimately lead at some point in time to the courts... Commissioner Wake is working on this right now. I am not trying to delay. I just want to make sure that it's right. But you can expect to have a code that is harmonized, that is uniform across 444 municipalities that will withstand any court test that comes before it, and that will ultimately protect you and your staffs and give us what we need... a code that you can feel confident in and it gives you and the people that work with you protection...the reality is that you deserve something. I want to get it right. And we will, I promise you, we will get this right for you. Just give me a little bit more time.”

Asked by the Township of Zara how the government will work with municipalities and property owners to best consider the feasibility of wind farms as possible energy solutions, Minister Lecce stated that the government has learned two principles: 1) The provincial government cannot impose energy projects on municipalities without local municipal consent and 2) Renewable energy solutions are necessary, but a concerted effort must be made to protect agricultural land. He stated that the government wants to work with municipalities to ensure the work of building clean energy infrastructure is done right.

Asked by the Town of Mississippi Mills how the government plans to increase child care spaces, and make child care more affordable, Minister Dunlop stated that, per the new child care agreement, there is a 70/30 ratio for not-for-profit to profit, leaving thousands of spots empty. She stated that is meeting with Federal Minister Sudds shortly, and will be advocating for flexibility in that ratio, and urged municipalites to pass motions calling for flexibility so that she can show that to Minister Sudds.

Asked by the Municipality of South Frontenac how the government can help build more homes in rural Ontario, particularly when the environmental assessment process takes three years, Minister Calandra stated: "Rural Ontario can no longer be left out of the equation...we have to start to do things a little bit differently....Removing obstacles that we have between Environment and Natural Resources. My Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the goal of the next year is to ensure that no part of this province is left behind...I think we can do a heck of a lot better job...We're going to get this job done, and we're going to involve rural Ontario, because...people are coming to your communities. There are massive investments that are coming to your communities...We won't leave you behind."

Asked by Niagara Region when the government will pass Bill 173 and declare intimate partner violence an epidemic, Associate Minister Williams stated that the government has committed \$1.4 billion over the next three years to organizations working to keep women safe. She stated that the government has received \$163 million from the federal government and has an open call for proposals for \$100 million that closes October 11th. She stated that Bill 173 is currently at committee and commended the work done by PA Dixon there, because the government doesn't want to just declare IPV an epidemic without having concrete plans in place to deal with the issue. She stated that PA Dixon's work has revealed that organizations and community supports oftentimes are not communicating and working together, resulting in duplication of services, and she called on municipal leaders to be service organizers to help with this.

Asked by the Chair of the Ontario Big City Mayors Caucus if the government will, as all Opposition parties have done at the AMO conference, commit to reviewing municipal funding models and bring a New Deal for all municipalities, Minister Bethlenfalvy stated that the most recent Budget announced a 40% increase to the Homelessness Prevention Program to fund capital and supportive housing, the Ministry of Health is investing in several health sectors including mental health and addiction care, and the

Ministry of Infrastructure is investing in infrastructure to build more roads, highways, broadband access and housing.

Asked by the Township of Brock what the province's plans are for the future of the Greenbelt Council, Minister Calandra stated: "When you talk about the Greenbelt, we put protection of the Greenbelt not in regulation, but it is protected in legislation across the province of Ontario. It is never had the level of protection that it has that it has right now across the province of Ontario...I'm very proud of that. We're the first government to do that."

Asked by the Municipality of Shuniah what the government is doing to help communities in northwestern Ontario to build infrastructure, sustain and develop resources, and include other First Nations partners and municipalities, Minister Rickford stated that the modernized NOHFC has created several community enhancing measures, and stated: "The best thing the government of Ontario can do is RESPOND: Regional Economic Support Promoting Ontario's Northern Development".

Asked by the City of Ottawa if the government will work with the public transit industry on a plan to enhance gas tax funding or other funding avenues to ensure affordable and reliable transit in Ontario, Minister Sarkaria stated that the government has made historic investments in transit and infrastructure and will continue to work with agencies, municipalities, cities and regions across Ontario on transit projects.

Remarks:

John Michael McGrath, Moderator: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the 2024 AMO Ministers' Forum. I am John Michael McGrath. Oh ... Hello? Can you hear me now? Good afternoon and welcome to the 2024 AMO Ministers' Forum. I'm John Michael McGrath and I will be your moderator today. Now, I'm not sure if everyone is aware, but there have been some changes to Cabinet, since Friday morning. Nevertheless, I have been told that, despite how new some of the ministers are to their files, they have spent the weekend studying furiously and are ready for your questions. With that, let me introduce the participating members of Cabinet for today's forum. We have quite a few names to get through, so I will ask you to please hold your applause until the end. If somebody next to you starts applauding, smack them.

Starting with the back row on the left, we have Graydon Smith in Natural Resources, we have Greg Rickford, the Minister of Northern Development and Minister of Indigenous Affairs. We have Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. We have Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. We have Doug Downey, the Attorney General. We have Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General; Kinga Surma, Minister of Infrastructure; Peter Bethlenfalvey, Minister of Finance; Sylvia Jones, Minister of Health and Deputy Premier; Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Prabmeet Sarkaria, Minister of Transportation; Jill Dunlop, Minister of Education; Rob Flack, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness; Stephen Lecce, Minister of Energy and Electrification; George Pirie, Minister of Mines; Natalia Kusendova-Bashta, Minister of Long-Term Care; Dave

Piccini, Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development; Nolan Quinn, Minister of Colleges and Universities; Stan Cho, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Gaming. Now, in the front row, we have Graham McGregor, Minister ... Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform; Nina Tangri, the Associate Minister of Small Business; Charmaine Williams, Associate Minister of Women's, Social and Economic -- Economic Opportunity; Kevin Holland, Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products; Michael Tibollo, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions; Michael Ford, Minister of Citizenship and Multiculturalism; Lisa Thompson, Minister of Rural Affairs; Todd McCarthy, Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement; Vijay Thanigasalam, the Associate Minister of Housing; Mike Harris, Minister of Red Tape Reduction; Neil Lumsden, Minister of Sport; Sam Oosterhoff, Associate Minister of Energy; Stephen Crawford, Associate Minister of Mines; Trevor Jones, Associate Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Response; And Raymond Cho, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility.

Okay, now, a round of applause for the ministers. Before we get going, I am just going to set up the rules for this forum. These won't be new if you've been there before. Only elected officials who are AMO delegates may ask questions to the ministers from the four microphones on the floor. You can only ask one question. Supplementaries and multi-part questions are really not welcome. Your questions should be about general municipal issues and not a specific detail in your own community. If your question has already been asked, either have an alternative in mind or let someone else go so that we can cover the greatest breadth of topics, please. Please identify yourself by name and your municipality and direct your question to the specific minister before you start asking the question. Please try to keep your question brief, briefer ideally than my introduction. And if you go on, I will politely ask you to get to the point. If anyone is planning on being abusive, please be aware that ROMA has empowered me to cut your mic and move on to the next question. On the ministers' side, please keep your answer to two minutes or less. And if you start to go over that, I will gently ask you to wrap it up again so that we can get to as many questions as possible. And as always, in case anyone tries to look for loopholes. The last rule is that new rules can be added at the discretion of the moderator. With all that said, let's get started. Do we have microphone one?

Questions from Elected Officials:

Jason Deneault, City Councillor of Kitchener: Yep. Hi, everybody. I'm Councillor Jason Deneault from the city of Kitchener. And my question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In Kitchener, we share your goals of building more housing across the continuum and to help make life more affordable. As you know, municipalities across the province are experiencing experiencing a significant increase of bad faith renovictions, and many vulnerable people are facing homelessness due to challenges in tenant protections. Many municipalities, like Kitchener, are trying to use the tools at our disposal through zoning and bylaw changes, however, truly impactful change is outside of our jurisdiction. In June of last year, your government passed Bill 97, Helping Homebuyers Protecting Tenants Act, which introduced a set of regulations aimed to address bad faith renovictions. Despite receiving royal assent, many of these

regulations have yet to be proclaimed. Will your government commit to bringing into force all regulations pertaining to Bill 97, as well as commit to a review of the Residential Tenancies Act to further protect tenants against bad faith investors and owners?

Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Thank you very -- thank you James for that, Let me just say about these new transition glasses, and the lights are so bright, they'll turn into sunglasses. So I can't see any of you, but a very important question, but let me just say this. Minister Downey and I are looking at the Landlord Tenant Board right now because we want to ensure that we make it to an appropriate standard for both tenants and for landlords. We have a situation right now, across the province of Ontario. Whether you're a tenant or a landlord, you're not necessarily bringing service as quickly as you can be. So once we have received, once we have gotten ourselves back into a balance, then we can look at, how we are going to provide those supports. But the reality is that we have to build more homes, more purpose built rentals across the province of Ontario. That is our number one challenge. And I worry right now that if we don't have an appropriate balance, that we will, in fact, be encouraging more people to take their units off the market and put them into Airbnb and, and and as such. So I want to first work on with Minister Downey on achieving that balance that we have to have continue to get shovels in the ground for more purpose built rentals across the province of Ontario. And then we can look at how we can further protect not only tenants, but how we can protect landlords from those situations. And for the most part, it's mom and pop landlords as well across the province of Ontario, who are faced with challenges. So I think we can do a better job of meeting a better equilibrium. Focusing on building, focusing on ensuring that we meet the standards that we've set. And we will get that, that job accomplished, both Minister Downey and myself.

McGrath: Thank you, minister. Microphone two, please.

Genevieve Lajoie, Mayor of Casselman: Hi. Thank you. My name is Genevieve Lajoie, I'm the mayor of Casselman. I just want to say I appreciate everything you guys do. I'm not sucking up. It's just from a political perspective, I understand the position you're in, and I appreciate it. My question is for the Solicitor General, Michael Kerzner. I was pleased to speak with the folks of Animal World Protection, Zoocheck, and the Toronto Zoo at this conference. And I was shocked to find out that Ontario is the only province that does not restrict the keeping of dangerous, exotic, wild animals such as lions and tigers and pets as pets in roadside zoos, but that this is the responsibility of municipalities. When can we expect provincial regulations to address this so the burden is no longer on us?

McGrath: Push and hold, minister.

Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General: Can you hear me now? Okay. Thank you very much for your question. Genevieve. You know, under the leadership of Premier Ford and, and, thanks to my predecessor, the deputy premier, we came forward with one of the

strongest animal welfare acts, the Provincial Animal Welfare Act, the PAWS Act, and Minister Sylvia Jones stewarded that. We have strengthened it further just over the last year. And we came forward also just before the legislature adjourned in June with the passing of the PUPS Act. So what we want to do is send a message throughout Ontario that we care about how people treat their animals. The issue that you've raised is something that we're going to continue, to look at and to work with municipalities, but more -- but moreover, it goes to the fact that we now have animal, animal welfare inspectors, throughout our province. And we have one of the toughest pieces of legislation and regulations that exist. And what we want to do, especially with the new PUPS Act, that many of you may be familiar with, some might not. We want to, specifically go after, as an example, you know, dog breeders who are unethical. So this is something, Genevieve, we will work with you. Rest assured, we will continue to explore it. And thank you so kindly for your question.

McGrath: Thank you, minister, and thank you, Minister (inaudible) for the assist there. Microphone three, please.

Paul Vicente, Regional Councillor of Brampton: Thank you very much, chair. My name is Paul Vicente, I'm a regional councillor from the city of Brampton. And I would like to congratulate our new Associate Minister for Auto Theft and Bail Reform. Thank you, Graham. We call him, Brampton Graham. And he's a champion for for Brampton. Minister, we have all across the province been experiencing a lot of problems with auto theft. People, their cars are gone and in in no time. Thieves are breaking into our homes and stealing the keys from our entry doorways. We've had situations in Brampton. I'm sure it's happened elsewhere, where, you know, they're using long knives to break into our doorways and axes, etcetera. There's been people who have found thieves in their bedroom with weapons, and we hear the stories of this happening all across the province, and. And I appreciate that you're representing two very important parts of this. The idea that we want to prevent criminals from getting back out and being able to commit crimes against us. Again, so I want to thank your government for creating this portfolio and minister, can you just tell us what we can expect from your portfolio, from your ministry? What are some of the things that you're thinking of doing to make all Ontarians safer? Thank you.

Graham McGregor, Associate Minister of Auto Theft and Bail Reform: Well, thank you, Councillor Vicente for that, tough but fair question. I, look, I think, my position was created out of the realization that our government has that the status quo around criminal justice is just unacceptable. What you hear, we have cars being stolen out of driveways, but we also have the other kind of auto theft, which is, you know, give me the keys with a, with a weapon, knife or gun. We had a situation in Peel Region, where I'm from, Project Warlock, 18 people that were arrested, 150 criminal code charges were were laid for things like violent carjacking, somebody being woken up with a gun to their head saying, give me the keys. By the time police were announcing it, nine of them were out on bail. We can't, we can't keep having the same system where, you know, the same criminals, the same bad guys are out three, four, five, six, seven, eight times. I know that many of you have heard this, in your communities, and heard this from your

police, the, the, the impact that that has on their job, not only on public safety, but just the demoralizing impact, frankly, when when they're literally being taunted by some of these guys. So, and, and also thinking from a victim's perspective, imagine you get violent carjacked, and then you -- police do their job, they catch the bad guy that did it, and then they're out on bail. The next week, you see them at the gym. The status quo is unacceptable. There are a few things or some things that we've done well already. Getting more cops and, you know, 2,000 cops graduate a year, used to be 1,400, giving police the tools they need. There are things we need to do a better job of at the province. And there are things we need of the federal partners that are right down the street that they need to do. I understand judges interpret the laws. We can't tell them what to do as politicians, but we do write the rubric that they're held to. And the federal government does write the rubric that they're held to when they make these decisions. So we need change there. We need real change. That being said, day two on the job. You'll be hearing more from me soon. And don't worry, the bad guys will hear from me soon as well. Thanks.

McGrath: And thank you for that, minister. Microphone four, please.

Judy Greenwood-Speers, Mayor of Frontenac Islands: Judy Greenwood-Speers, Mayor of Frontenac Islands. I'd like to thank the ministers that have worked with me in the past, including Minister Wilson and Minister Calandra, that, gave me 20 minutes of his time. And I would like to applaud Minister Jones if she's actually making the investment in long-term drug rehab beds, because as a former administrator of rehab, that is exactly what's needed to help the people on methadone and suboxone. My question is, my question is for the Minister of Transportation. I'd like to thank him for after four years finally allowing our village dock on Wolfe Island to be used. However, I have to tell you, an 80-minute ferry service versus a 60-minute ferry service is described as inferior. So I have a report for you with 250 responses that came back within 48 hours. And I want this to be a good news story. It's a big investment. And what we have is the existing boat that should be a dual ferry system tied up currently at the dock. Please let me have a good news story that we can have the dual ferry system that was identified in 2011, and if you're not going to do it, you're killing my community and you need to know it. Thank you.

McGrath: Minister Sarkaria.

Prabmeet Sarkaria, Minister of Transportation: Thank you very much, your worship. Appreciate the comment and your passionate advocacy on this piece. MTO will continue to work with your team. As you know, just this past weekend, we launched, the new Wolfe Islander, ferry service, which does accommodate 50 per cent more capacity. And we've heard from residents, who have been able to, to use it, currently. So we're making progress on it. And it's something that we'll continue to monitor and obviously work with. I look forward to receiving the report from you as well. When I get a chance to maybe right after this bear pit session. But, we're proud of the progress we've made and obviously want to make the journey seamless between the island for residents. And we'll continue to do that, not only there, but across, many of other regions that are also

using the ferries. But, I do want to note that ferry that has come in to service does increase the capacity by over 50 per cent. And also over the past weekend, I don't think a single car was still left behind. So, we do accommodate and take into consideration a lot of the challenges and unique circumstances of each community and work with, with you. But I do want to thank you for, for all your work on it and look forward to speaking to you after to collect that report. Thank you.

McGrath: Microphone one, please.

Mary Lou Roe, City Councillor of Waterloo: Good afternoon. My name is Mary Lou Roe, I'm city councillor, city of Waterloo. I'd like to direct my question to Minister Harris. Your government recommitted today to reducing red tape. And yet, municipalities find themselves mired in red tape by having to apply and compete for grants such as the Housing Enabling Water System Fund, which if not successful, actually fuels uncertainty and slows our ability to move forward on much needed developments. What will your government do to actually reduce this type of red tape and give municipalities the certainty we need to build more homes and reach the targets set by your government?

Mike Harris, Minister of Red Tape Reduction: Well, thank you so much for the question. And it's a good question. And it's something that that's actually come up quite a bit over the deliberations we've had over the last couple of days and looking at ways that we can streamline the grant writing process, I think across the board, is definitely something that our ministry will be looking into. And of course, working with our partner ministries here. So colleagues, get ready for that. It's going to be coming at some point. But you know what? When we look at sort of the overall sort of landscape of red tape and what we've been able to do since 2018, we've reduced regulatory burden to the tune of \$1.2 billion just through red tape reduction packages that this government has put forward. We have a new legislative package that will be coming, shortly, once we get back for our fall session. And of course, we want to keep the lines of communication open with our ministry. You're going to hear from us a lot more than you have in the past, and certainly want to build those relationships. And, really appreciate the question. Thank you.

McGrath: Microphone two, please.

Kelsie Van Belleghem, City Councillor of Kenora: Thank you, JMM, I'm still a big fan of the podcast. So my question is for -- Sorry, Kelsie Van Belleghem, councillor for the city of Kenora. My questions for Minister Parsa, and/or Minister Kerzner, I will allow you to decide who feels more appropriate. But my question is, municipalities have been mandated to produce community safety and well-being plans. While understand having personal -- personalized plans for each community to address our unique challenges, many of us, if not all, are facing the same or similar challenges. And I worry about the efficacy of these plans if they are being done off the side of our desk and in a vacuum. Given that many years identified as focus areas by the province fall outside of the jurisdiction of municipalities, my question is this: What is the province doing to ensure plans are in line with provincial initiatives, and to ensure that municipalities have a

cohesive approach to addressing the challenges identified when outside of our jurisdiction? I want to work together for a safer community too.

McGrath: Minister Kerzner, do you want to take that first or Minister Parsa?

Solicitor General Kerzner: Well, thanks Kelsie for your question. You know, the short answer is we want to work with the municipalities. We want to learn, exactly what will work best in their communities. And I had a number of delegation meetings, which were very important. And what we know is, as example, we support, there's there's funding to support, on the policing side. There's grants that that the moneys have flown in Kenora as an example to the OPP for part of that plan. And I've said to the municipalities, you know, let us know what part of, of the community safety plan, you know, is something that maybe we should be looking at and other grant or other funding mechanisms as well to help support it, because some municipalities have said, look, this is part of it, but you don't have currently a funding mechanism for it. But, you know, again, this is something we'll look across government to see whether Minister Para's ministry or other ministries have it. The short answer is we will work with municipalities morning, noon and night.

McGrath: Minister Parsa?

Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services: Thank you and thanks for the question. I'll just add this, and throughout the entire delegation and every time that we've attended, whether it's AMO or NOMA or other draft forums. The question has always been, how do are we able to provide better supports in partnership and collaboration together, and in particular some of the areas, I mean, we've talked about this at some of our delegations. You know, some of the solutions that might fit in one area might not be the same. It would not be a perfect fit. For example, north northern Ontario rural areas might have different solutions. So we look to you as partners, all of us here as ministers, we look to you for solutions, some localized answers of solutions that you can provide to us, as partners, for us to be able to support you in the initiative and the work that you're doing on the ground.

McGrath: Microphone three, please.

Stephanie Jaworski, Councillor of the Township of South Glengarry: [00:21:30] Thank you. I'm Stephanie Jaworski, I'm a councillor in the township of South Glengarry, just east of here in the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry. I'm also vice chair of the Community Schools Alliance. And my question is for Minister Dunlop. First of all, congratulations Minister Dunlop on your appointment as the Minister of Education and we at the Community Schools Alliance look forward to working with you. Now, my question is, in his role as Minister of Education, Minister Lecce, was clear that the provincial government would maintain the moratorium on school closures until a fulsome review of the funding formula had taken place with a rural lens to ensure that it would recognize the true economic and community impacts of schools and school closures in rural communities. So understanding that there's significant and rising

pressure from urban school boards to lift that moratorium, if and when the school closure moratorium is lifted, would the provincial government consider protecting schools on the rural and northern education allocation list from being considered for closure? Thank you.

McGrath: Minister Dunlop.

Jill Dunlop, Minister of Education: Thank you for the question, Stephanie. And day two on the job. I've definitely taken in a lot, a lot of delegations I've heard from the municipalities. So it's definitely -- I've learned a lot in this last couple of days. But, you know, my priority right now is maintaining stability in the sector. I'm looking forward to working with educators, with trustees, boards, parents and of course, the students. We will be maintaining the moratorium because I know and I've talked to many municipalities here over the last couple of days. You know, we've seen the impact of closures of in rural school areas and that the impact that that can have. So under our new plan, we're keeping schools open. I've had many delegations where we've talked about the exciting capital projects that are happening. In fact, under Minister Lecce's leadership, we doubled the capital priorities and that funding. So I look forward to seeing those proposals come forward. I want to remind our municipalities and our boards that those are due September 16th. And, you know, it's really interesting to hear, the municipalities and the relationships that they have with their school boards. We really want to see closer connections. They're working together, sharing of data and better planning into the future. So as of right now, that moratorium is going to be maintained and keeping stability in the sector. Thank you for your question.

McGrath: Microphone four, please.

Mara Nagy, City Councillor of Pickering: Hi, my name is Mara Nagy, I'm a councillor in Pickering. This question is for Minister Calandra. Yesterday afternoon, Lisa Robinson, a councillor with us in Pickering, was able to hold a press conference at Parliament Hill. She used taxpayer funding to get herself to AMO and use this conference as a way to slander the rest of us on council in a press conference that was called utterly bizarre by a member of the press. This follows the three appearances, with an upcoming fourth at her instigation, on an alt-right podcast hosted by a convicted criminal who has fled the country to avoid consequences for his hate crimes. This is the latest in a string of indiscretions that our council has outlined to you, minister. The alt-right have come into our chambers and explicitly said that Pickering is a test case. They've prided themselves on trustees and councillors being elected in other provinces. Minister, despite my examples, this is not about one person. This is a provincial crisis. We are here now because no one could have imagined the egregiousness of this behavior. No one would have made this rule before, because no one could imagine a politician saying the things that we are hearing. But as a result of the lack of implementation. I, my mayor, my councillors and our families are being targeted with no resolution but a very minute penalty for this aggressor. In the last year, we've been constantly living with death threats, incitement to violence, harassment, psychological trauma and the constant fear, emotional, personal toll and exhaustion that we did not ask for. And that

shouldn't come with our positions. We all have a job to do and we've been doing ours. So now we implore you to help us. This is a councillor who is disrupting our meetings, delaying business, and creating so much chaos to the point that we are unable to move forward with motions and resolutions. We have heard from developers and businesses who are concerned that housing is not being built, and that businesses are afraid to come to Pickering. Please let us help you connect with municipalities to create a powerful tool with teeth. I invite you to take me up personally on this, and I will work side by side with you to make sure that what I have experienced in the last year and a half of my term, my first term, by the way, is not something that anyone else ever has to go through again. A year has passed--

McGrath: If, if we bring the applause down, we can get to the question sooner.

Councillor Nagy: Thank you. A year has passed since a similar question was posed to you. Sorry, not you, it was to then, Minister Clark, from Lindsay Koch of Kenora. So I'm here asking again. Help us, please. What proof do you need to demonstrate that this legislation is required? And when you have this, when can we expect to see something? We cannot continue this way. Either take action or empower us to take action. Because these are not the values of Ontarians, and this rhetoric cannot be allowed to fester. Thank you.

McGrath: Minister Calandra.

Minister Calandra: Yeah. No. Look, I appreciate the question. And and I know we have, you've been waiting. Look, I understand, completely. Look, I, I, my riding is is Markham-Stouffville and we, we had a challenge ourselves, prior to this mayor and council being elected. So I understand. We have similar situation in Richmond Hill. I don't think that any more evidence is required to, for us to better understand that we need to improve the integrity process, the code of conduct, for to protect, better protect, our municipal employees. It's it's the number one reason why we have asked the, the provincial integrity commissioner to come forward with a recommendation. Because what I want to ensure that we do that when we bring something forward, whatever we bring forward is able to stand the first test. And that first test will ultimately lead at some point in time to the courts. And I want to ensure that what we bring forward can withstand that first test. So what we've asked the integrity commissioner to report back on and to give recommendations on, which we will move on, is to present us with a code that is harmonized across 444 municipalities across the province of Ontario. The more that I have learned about this, the more that I've travelled and talked to you, it is really become -- it's a wild west of integrity, legislation, commissioners, how it works. And I just want to make sure that I get it right. I know that you're waiting. I know what you're going through in in your community. I know how tough it is because I saw the councillors in my own riding when they were faced with -- the councillors and the staff, in my own community, when they were faced with something very, very similar, and I resolved them, wasn't elected them, I resolved them that we had to do something, and we're going to get it right. Commissioner Wake is working on this right now. I am not trying to delay. I just want to make sure that it's right. But you can expect to have a code

that is harmonized, that is uniform across 444 municipalities, that will withstand any court test that comes before it, and that will ultimately protect you and your staffs and give us what we need. A code that, that you can feel confident in and it gives you, you and the people that work with you protection, that you so, so -- I didn't watch that news conference yesterday. I heard it was, it was bizarre. But the reality is, the reality is that you deserve something. I want to get it right. And we we will, I promise you, we will get this right for you. Just give me a little bit more time.

McGrath: Thank you, minister. Microphone one please.

Marcus Ryan, Mayor of the Township of Zorra: Thank you, JMM. I'm worried that my question is going to be part of a dramatic lunch bag letdown after the last one. Marcus Ryan, the mayor of the Township of Zorra and warden of Oxford County. And my question is for, Minister Lecce, Minister of Energy. Given that Ontario needs energy to support our growth and the IESO predicts brownouts without new supply being added, and renewable energy is the choice of most new industries coming to Ontario, many municipalities, like Zorra Township and Oxford County, are committed to 100 per cent renewable energy. How will your ministry work with municipalities and property owners to best consider the feasibility of wind farms as possible energy solutions?

Stephen Lecce, Minister of Energy and Electrification: Thank you very much. It's good to hear from you in a different different hat that you wear. Look, the first principle is in a lesson learned, that many municipal leaders have shared with this government over the past years is that you cannot have Queen's Park impose energy projects on municipalities without local consent. And our government understands the importance of democratizing this decision to local government. And we frankly, stand alone because it was just five or six years ago when the government of the day was imposing those projects without local concern for renewables or anything else. And I think as a first principle, we will respect the local will of municipalities on going forward when it comes to new energy infrastructure. The second principle is we do support renewable energy. Absolutely. As we do as we build out our clean energy advantage in the province, roughly 90 per cent of our grid is already emission free. And we see that as a value add, as we attract investment and as we continue to reduce emissions, the only province in the nation to be on track to meet our GHG reductions. So we see this as a really important step forward, both from environmental and an economic progress. What I'd say is it's important, though, when we build out our renewable programs that we make a concerted effort to protect agricultural land. This is very important to you as municipal leaders, and it's very important to the colleague to my right, Minister Flack, the Minister of Agriculture in Ontario, and to our rural communities. Food security is really important to our country and to our future. So we will protect farmlands. We will work with municipalities to build out solar and wind in the appropriate places. And you will see us really leading into energy expansion of renewable energy, of nuclear energy, hydro electric, all of the above. Because frankly, colleagues, the IESO is predicting a minimum 60 per cent increase in electricity generation will be needed and forecasted by 2048. We have to double the grid. It's a huge public policy challenge, and so we will want to work with you, enable you, and frankly, collaborate with communities to get this right,

build the infrastructure that is clean, that is reliable and remains affordable for the people of Ontario.

McGrath: Thank you, minister. Microphone two, please.

Christa Lowry, Mayor of Mississippi Mills: Thank you. Thank you. My name is Christa Lowry, I'm the mayor in Mississippi Mills and Lanark County. My question is for Minister Dunlop, Ministry of Education. And again, congratulations on your very brand new role. Thousands of children in Ontario are without child care. CWELCC has created affordable child care for a portion of Ontario children and leaves the remainder of children in the dark. On August 15th, we learned that non-CWELCC participating licencees delivering child care to children aged 0 to 5 will no longer be eligible for routine funding as of 2025. This will mean the loss of much needed child care spaces, or making those spaces more expensive to make up for lost revenue. Expansion spaces under CWELCC come nowhere close to addressing a demand and non-CWELCC participating child care spaces are being lost. Minister, what will you do to increase accessibility and afford -- affordability of child care? In short, what are your plans to increase child care spaces for the families in our communities?

Minister Dunlop: Well, thank you for that question, Christa. And definitely, probably 50 per cent, of the delegations I had over the past couple days, we were discussing child care. So obviously very important issue for our municipalities. And I can tell you, as a mother of three daughters, it's been a long time since they were in child care, but how important it is to increase women's economic participation. So with the the new CWELCC agreement, there's a 70, 30 ratio for not-for-profit to profit. And so we're leaving thousands of seats, you know, potential seats empty. And so last week, Minister Todd Smith, at the time, announced the the funding formula. I have the opportunity to meet with the federal minister, Minister Sudds, coming up shortly. And I'm going to advocate for flexibility, with that ratio. And we've heard that from many municipalities. I think, you know, you know better than Toronto or Ottawa the needs in your community. So I'm going to, I want to thank the municipalities I met with who have already passed a motion to to look at this, the flexibility in that ratio. So I would encourage anybody who is, you know, needing more child care seats in their municipalities to please do the same. I need to have that defence to take with me when I meet with the minister. But we will be advocating for more seats in this province. We know it is, you know, tremendous, need in the area. I heard, you know, from many municipalities about the waitlist. You know, we have a commitment to build 86,000 additional seats, and we're going to do that, and we're going to work together. And I want to thank AMO for the cooperation with the funding formula that we were able to land last week. So thank you very much.

McGrath: Thank you, Minister. Microphone three, please.

Ron Vandewal, Mayor of South Frontenac: Hi I'm Ron Vandewal, mayor of South Frontenac. Seeing I can't ask two questions, the first one is just going to be a small statement, and then I'll get to my question.

McGrath: Do keep it brief.

Mayor Vandewal: Would the province of Ontario please look at opening up the severance rules for marginal land in eastern Ontario instead of using good farmland? That's just my comment. And I wish you would look at that. Secondly. The province says that they want to speed up housing. They want all of us to be participants. Frontenac County created a Municipal Services Corporation, we are looking at projects of using water and wastewater. We have, in my own municipality, we have 100-unit mixed housing project that has been three years in an environmental assessment, three years. And that process still needs approval from Source Water, who does not talk to environment, and they could turn it down at the end by the time we get there. So if you want to speed up things, help us. We're willing to work. Rural Ontario is willing to build. But we need to move some of these things forward. And the perfect example of the Municipal Services Corporation, find a couple of manufacturers that the province agrees to, and then it wouldn't take three years for an environmental assessment.

McGrath: And I'm sorry, who would you like to direct that question to?

Mayor Vandewal: Well, I have spoken with Minister Calandra. He knows it. I'm just saying, if the province wants it to speed up, rural Ontario will. But you have to help us. Get through all of those hurdles.

McGrath: Do you want to comment on that, minister?

Minister Calandra: Yeah. No, no. Look, I it's, it's great. I came in and we visited with MPP Jordan, brought, brought us out and, and we heard what you're doing there. And as I said in my speech, absolutely, rural Ontario can no longer be left out of the equation. Right? We have to start to do things a little bit differently. And in many instances, we just have to catch up. And that is why in the speech I also said it's not just about holding you accountable, it's about holding ourselves accountable. Right? Removing obstacles that we have, obstacles between environment and natural resources, my Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The goal of the next year is to ensure that no part of this province is left behind. Delegation after delegation after delegation said to me, we want to be a part of building 1.5 million homes. I think we can do a heck of a lot better job. I think we can look at communal systems across the province of Ontario. We're going to get this job done, and we're going to involve rural Ontario, because without you and look, people are coming to your communities. There are massive investments that are coming to your communities. I talked about Athens, a new long-term care home, with four hours of care. That means lots of jobs that are coming to small communities. We won't leave you behind. We will remove our obstacles and really applaud you for the work that you're doing. We're going to get these systems, and we're going to build them out in all parts of the province of Ontario, because it's the right thing to do, and we're not leaving anyone behind. That I promise you.

Minister Calandra: Thank you, Minister Calandra. Microphone four, please.

Haley Bateman, Regional Councillor of Niagara Region: Good evening. My name is Haley Bateman. I'm a councillor with the Region of Niagara. I am a former Women's Place employee, so working at women's shelters. I am also an advocate for 'Women of Ontario Say No' to get the legislation, that was talked about earlier passed. I want to make sure we talk about that again. Thank you. Bill 173 came across your desk to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic. We didn't hear a lot from the premier about any social services. We heard about infrastructure, upon infrastructure today. When will Bill 173 be passed? And when will we start making the lives of women in our children in our community a priority?

McGrath: And sorry, which minister would you like?

Councillor Bateman: Oh, I'm not sure.

Charmaine Williams, Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity: That would be me.

Councillor Bateman: Thank you.

Minister Williams: I'll take that question. Thank you so much for the question. So, you know, we've committed to spending 1.4 billion over the next three years to organizations that are working to keep women safe across Ontario. When I signed the GBVNAP, which is the Gender-Based Violence National Action Plan, we received 163 million from the federal government to enhance some of this work. So right now, we are, we do have an open call for proposals of \$100 million to flow. But, you know, I have to commend my parliamentary assistant, Jess Dixon, for the work that she is doing at committee. Right now, committee is reviewing Bill 173. But, you know, it's not going to just come out and say whether we're going to declare it an epidemic or not. It's going to have concrete plans associated with it. And so what Jess Dixon has been doing has been hearing from many service providers and experts to understand what we can do better in Ontario to keep women safe. And one of the things that's been highlighted numerous times is that organizations aren't often talking to each other, and community supports are not often working together to understand where we're duplicating services. And so that's where I look to our municipal leaders, all of you, to be those overarching service organizers, bring all organizations to the table and every single piece, every single aspect, especially if you take a journey of a woman that is experiencing violence and understand what organizations is she going to get support, understand what barriers is she facing. Some women often are unable to leave safely because they are responsible for livestock, or they have pets. So, you know, we say look at the pet services as well. Cast a wide net, bring all organizations together to understand what that journey is, and work with the organizations to help them, you know, find out where the gaps are. Understand what services are doing well, but maybe need more resources and use this as an opportunity to apply for funding right now. Because if you go to Engage Ontario, we are ready to flow \$100 million to fill those gaps in your municipalities so that no woman is left behind. And once that committee is done, it will have a report with all of the recommendations and the things that we know we need to

do to keep every single woman safe in Ontario. And so, I want to encourage all of us to do this work soon, now, because the call for proposals will close on October 11th. And even within my ministry, I worked in children's mental health a long time. Many women weren't able to safely leave abusive relationships because they could not afford to leave. So we're investing 20 million on economic development and economic opportunities, training wraparound supports for women, so that they have the resources and the ability to be able to rebuild their lives safely and keep themselves safe. Because we know when you help a woman, you're not just helping her. You're helping her children, her kids, and the community at large. So we're committed to getting that work done. And please take a look at committee. You can see it broadcasted online so you can follow along. And also if you have organizations that are not participating, let my parliamentary assistant, Jess Dixon, she might be in the room, let her know so she can invite them to the table as well. Thank you.

McGrath: Thank you, minister. Microphone one, please.

Marianne Meed Ward, Chair of Ontario Big City Mayors: Thank you very much. My name is Mayor Marianne Meed Ward. The mayor is actually part of my name. I'm the chair of the Ontario Big City Mayors Caucus, but I'm also a board member of AMO. This question is directed to Minister Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. You may have heard about our SolvethetheCrisis.ca Campaign. It's it's a T-shirt, but it's also a website where people can go and download a resolution for councils. Encourage your residents to, add their name to our call for action on mental health, addictions and homelessness. It's a crisis facing every community. But we need a solution for every community, not just those communities that are lucky enough to get a funding announcement. And so I'm not here to actually talk about the SolvethetheCrisis campaign. I'm here to talk about the larger issue that this is a symptom of, which is how municipalities are funded and our fiscal relationship with the province and also the federal government. AMO is 125 years old this year, and our fiscal relationship with the province hasn't changed in 125 years. And yet the issues that we are being asked to deal with, that land on our front door, are much more complex than have been when AMO was formed. Allocation programs are unpredictable, and it makes municipalities compete with each other for scarce dollars. It's really kind of the Hunger Games of municipal funding programs. Municipalities across the province have been asking you to come to the table, convene a group and review municipal fiscal relationships. A new deal for all cities, not just one. So when will your government commit to this critical discussion, as every other leader of a party has done so over this weekend. Thank you.

McGrath: Minister Calandra.

Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance: I'm happy to kick off and I'll look over my shoulder to Minister Calandra as well. Thank you for that that question. And, you know, this is, very important to all of us. 444 municipalities around Ontario. And, we take this issue obviously, very seriously. There's a lot of work to do. You know, as we met yesterday morning seems like a lifetime ago with the big city mayors. We did talk about this. We agreed how important, how we tackle the homelessness, the opioid, the

addictions, the mental health crisis, as you say, that we have in this province. To that end, we're going to continue to support in many different ways. In one of the first ways was a year ago in my budget, when we had this conversation, I announced an increase to the homelessness prevention program of 40 per cent in one year. Finance ministers sometimes can do 10 per cent a year. But no, the crisis and the issue is here and it's now. So that 40 per cent increase in homelessness prevention program to provide funding, in part for capital and supportive housing, but also for wraparound services. And that's a very important part. But that's just one piece. I've got a great Minister of Health just to my left here, who's tackling a range of health related issues and making investments right across our community in primary care, acute care, long-term care, mental health and addiction care. I've got a minister to my right who's making record investments in infrastructure so we can provide the housing as well, and the infrastructure so we can build more, that we can build roads and highways and move people and and broadband. The announcement today, Minister Jones, that you made today, is another step in that process of helping our most vulnerable people. So you have a government that certainly is willing to engage and talk frequently about the issues. We thank you for raising that issue repeatedly. We're working together. We'll continue to work with you, mayor, and with your colleagues. Not just the big city mayors, but all mayors right across this great province. And JMM why don't I pass the balance of that to the good minister, municipal affairs and homelessness.

McGrath: If you want to take 10 or 15 seconds, minister.

Minister Calandra: Look, I think he, he, he said it, and we'll get on to the next question.

McGrath: Okay. Microphone two, please.

Lori Hoddinott, Deputy Mayor of the Township of McNab/Braeside: Good afternoon. My name is Lori Hoddinott, I'm deputy mayor of the Township of McNab/Braeside. This is my first term as a politician. And I sit at a table with a member that has appallingly racked up more than 25 breaches of the code of conduct, and the total is continuing to rise. My question is, for Minister Calandra, perhaps the Attorney General. In January, I had a conversation with you, Minister Calandra, at ROMA, about the elected officials accountability legislation, the potential charter issues, and a solution that's looked really good, being that a provincial review system be put in place, when a file is forwarded from the integrity commissioner, and if it's deemed appropriate, then voted on by the provincial assembly, eliminating the risk of abuse of that power at a municipal level when personalities can interplay when making such a decision. My question in a nutshell is what happened? Because that sounded like an easy, simple, doable solution, and if it's not a solution to bring this legislation forward, and we desperately need it, then are there any other solutions on the horizon? This is not a want. This is a need. We need to step up for our municipal employees and for councillors and residents and give them the same protection that is awarded to every private sector employee, every provincial and federal employee. We need it at the municipal level, and we need your help. My residents are bearing the brunt of legal bill after legal bill after legal bill with this continuous integrity commissioner investigations.

McGrath: Minister Calandra.

Minister Calandra: Look, I appreciate it. As part of the challenge that we had when we spoke, is the challenge of 444 different codes. With 444 different ways of, of tackling, this issue. And that is why we've engaged the, the, the integrity commissioner here in the province of Ontario, Commissioner Wake, who has decades of experience on this. I want to make sure that, as I said earlier, whatever we bring forward you can rest assured it's going to be a harmonized approach, and it will be an approach that will survive its first test. And, and I'm expecting the commissioner to report back very soon on on that. And, look, I, I understand, I appreciate, what you and others have been fighting for. We're going to get it done, and we'll we'll do, we'll bring forward a code that I think that we can all be proud of, but more importantly, provides a protection for you and the people that work with you.

McGrath: Attorney General.

Doug Downey, Attorney General: Thank you for the opportunity. I don't really have anything specific to add except to say I'm playing a supporting role for Minister Calandra's very steady hand on this issue. This is something that that he's spoken about often, and I look forward to the integrity commissioner's recommendations and comments. Thank you.

McGrath: Thank you for that. Sorry, I think I lost track -- microphone three, please.

Walter Schummer, Mayor of the Township of Brock: Thank you very much. Walter Schummer, I'm the mayor of the Township of Brock in the Region of Durham. My first question was a fiscal one, exactly as was asked, I'm not sure it was answered, but it was certainly asked. So I won't ask that one again, other than to say, other other than to say, we're still waiting to be made whole. My second question or my question will be, that the province takes the Greenbelt seriously. We have been told this, time and time again. It is a big issue in the province. The Township of Brock is completely in the Greenbelt. I'm just wondering, and, of course, I guess this is a question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. When will the province be repopulating the GreenBelt Council, which is charged with advising the government on matters regarding the Greenbelt? Currently, I believe there's only two of nine positions filled, so I'm just wondering when that will take place?

Minister Calandra: Yeah. Yeah. Well, thanks for that, Walter. Let me just say you talk about being made whole, I think over the last year, we've listened to you, to our municipal partners quite a bit. We brought in legislation through Bill 185 that took a look at development charges. Because you asked us to do that. We've looked at the definition of attainable housing because we heard from AMO and from all of you, that the definition that had been brought forth through Bill 23 would have disadvantaged you to the tune of over \$5 billion. We changed that definition to ensure that you all had the resources that you need. We brought forward an affordable housing definition, which

was unanimously supported by the entire legislative assembly of the province of Ontario, if I'm not mistaken, which was supported by AMO as well. We have a Minister of Infrastructure who's brought forward a \$3 billion infrastructure program across the province of Ontario. In your community, we are building long-term care homes. We're building hospitals in, in, in your community. So we are working very hard and very closely with our municipal partners to ensure that we get shovels in the ground. And when you talk about being made whole, this province is providing our municipal partners more money than we ever have before. Does that mean that the job is done? No. That is why in my speech I talked about rural Ontario. I don't need to take any lessons about how difficult it is in rural parts of this province. I was informed in talking with Mayor Fort in Hornepayne. You know, building a bridge in Hornepayne, very difficult, for them. Right? It's very difficult to repair that bridge because a 1 or 2 per cent increase in the property tax rate doesn't go that far. So we're looking at addressing that by working together. When you talk about the Greenbelt, we put protection of the Greenbelt not in regulation, but it is protected in legislation across the province of Ontario. It is never had the level of protection that it has that it has right now across the province of Ontario, it is legislated the boundaries of of of the Greenbelt. I'm very proud of that. We're the first government to do that. So we'll continue to work with you, we'll continue to listen. I thought the Minister of Finance provided a wonderful, wonderful answer. But we will work together with all of you so that we can ensure that we can build bigger, better, stronger communities and that all parts of this province are brought with us in meeting the goal of building 1.5 million homes. Other parts of this province are doing it. Brock can do it. And I know that when we work together, we'll get the job done.

McGrath: Microphone four.

Wendy Landry, Mayor of the Municipality Shuniah: Thank you. Thank you very much. Wendy Landry, mayor of the Municipality Shuniah and the president of Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association. One quick comment to Minister Parsa, just a reminder to your comment about us bringing solutions to the table and being good partners. NOMA always comes with solution-based to answers to all of our questions and all of our concerns. So just a reminder that. My question today is for Minister Rickford. Minister Rickford, you have modernized the NOHFC, and it's doing some great work for us up in the north in attracting talent and building new sectors and enhancing communities with many, with few and limited resources to otherwise complete some of our projects. We understand that there's limits to the NOHFC funding. We appreciate the funding that we recently received for NOMA, for an intern to develop, to develop our regional economic development plan so that we can prove to the rest of the province that there is life in northwestern Ontario. And that's where the future is. But there are limits to what I know NOHFC can do. And that being said, I'd like to know what the government can do to help communities with surging opportunities that we have in the northwest to build legacy infrastructure, sustain develop resources, and include our First Nations partners and our municipalities. Thank you very much.

Greg Rickford, Minister of Northern Development and Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation: First of all, how about this extraordinary leader?

Wendy Landry. Wendy, I want to thank you. I don't know if I can keep it together for this. I've known, I've known Wendy for almost 20 years. It isn't about the fact that we've become great friends. We've been in meetings where we couldn't agree, where we wouldn't agree. But this person here brings, in my view, the best in class in sophistication to every meeting, to every opportunity that she's ever taken on with grace and world class advocacy skills. Back at you for the north, a voice for northern Ontario and particularly northwestern Ontario. Whether it's been Enbridge, Confederation College, the mayor of Shuniah, the president of NOMA, a proud member of the Red Rock Indian band. I want to let everybody know here today that the Association of Municipalities of Ontario has an extraordinary leader in Wendy Landry. Keep doing what you're doing and keep being amazing. In northern Ontario, hearing from, in from its modernization, Wendy has moved the dial for so many communities, particularly smaller communities and First Nations communities. We've created access to community enhancement programs to keep the families that are living in our communities and attract new ones. We've developed internship programs, as you said, to familiarize young people with good policy that can contribute to the greater good of Ontario. Whereas, zeroing in on new sectors, Vic here to the left, me would say, with a big smile that the film sector, in northern Ontario, northeastern Ontario -- Okay, that's enough of a smile, Vic, you've got lots of money for this -- is something that most of you folks probably aren't aware of, but is growing in leaps and bounds and is now a major destination for films and television production viewed around the world. We're drawing on our history in, in, the traditional resource sectors, and we're preparing our communities for a brighter future. That said, Wendy, in more modern and contemporary times, the best thing the government of Ontario can do is respond, regional economic support, promoting Ontario's northern development, brings all of our ministers together for surging communities. Take, for example, Greenstone. I think the mayor's here today, working and recognizing the opportunity for the largest municipality in size in this province, but one of the smallest populations, the opportunity, not the issues, related to being neighbours with four First Nations communities, which will move the centre of gravity or create a new one in mining and building legacy infrastructure. Ladies and gentlemen, recently, the Premier showed true leadership when he added First Nations economic reconciliation to the title of one of my ministries, because the Premier and our cabinet understand that the success of municipalities and First Nations communities are not mutually exclusive. That together, when we work together, whether it's through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund or other funding programs in ministries across government, we can bring resources to the table to make sure that 800,000 square kilometres strong, which we know is northern Ontario, will be an integral part of Ontario's success for the world, whether it's being represented--

McGrath: Minister, my apologies, do want to keep it going?

Minister Rickford: Are you shutting me down, bro?

McGrath: My apologies, minister.

Minister Rickford: I just got started. Anyways, this is an opportunity for all of us. It puts Ontario on the map, and it includes northern Ontario. Thanks, Wendy.

McGrath: Thank you for that. Microphone one, please.

Wilson Lo, City Councillor of Ottawa: Thank you. Hi, my name is Wilson Lo. I'm a city councillor here in the city of Ottawa. I just want to briefly, quickly welcome all of you here. Sorry about the weather. Since 2019, dedicated public transit funding or provincial gas tax, tax funding -- oh, my question is for Minister Sarkaria -- has remained relatively flat at around \$380 million, despite population growth, rising costs and new commuter trends. For example, right here in Ottawa, OC Transpo had a 14 per cent reduction in the 2023-24 gas tax allocation, exacerbating operating shortfalls. This issue is not isolated to Ottawa, but reflects a provincewide trend, where agencies are forced to choose between rising, raising fares, reducing service, deferring capital projects or all of the above just to ensure they can submit a balanced budget to their councils. While the Government of Ontario should be commended and is being commended for their investments in transit infrastructure, agencies across the province are facing significant operating shortfalls that threaten the frequency and reliability of transit service for Ontario's commuters. This means more people in cars, which is more costly for commuters and worsens congestion on our roads. Will your government work with the public transit industry on a plan to enhance gas tax funding or other funding avenues to ensure that people can access reliable and affordable transit in every corner of Ontario?

Minister Sarkaria: Thank you very much for that question. And, and, absolutely. Always willing to engage and work with our municipal partners across the province. But it has been historic investments from Premier Ford in our government in the transportation industry, especially on public transit, \$70 billion over the next 10 years. And we have stepped up whether it was during the pandemic that has really, changed the way people get to and from work or changed -- and I know right here in the city of Ottawa that has presented some very, very unique challenges, especially with some of the back to work policies from the federal government -- that has created a huge stress on Ottawa transport. But we've been there, and I know that, you know, and our government has worked with the city of Ottawa for over a \$500 million deal to help support with those unique challenges. But absolutely, we want to promote more public transit across this province. And that's what we've done with our ambitious plan to invest 70 billion over the next 10 years, which also has a component, for rural and small municipalities as well, recognizing the challenges across this province. So we will absolutely continue to work with municipal agencies, transit agencies, get those cars off the road where possible to invest in transit projects. And we're proud of that investment that we've been able to make to date. But, more work to be done on that, and continue to recognize certain challenges across the province. But, we're very proud of our record in investing in public transit that, unfortunately, was really ignored by previous governments. So we here to support public transit as well as invest in infrastructure across the province, \$100 billion between roads, bridges and public transit over the next 10 years, which no other government in the history of this province has committed to. And that's in every

corner of this province. So we'll continue to do that and work with our agencies, municipalities and, cities and regions across Ontario.

McGrath: Thank you for that, minister. Unfortunately, they have brought my teleprompters back up, which means that that is time. That's the equivalent of the Oscar orchestra playing me off. So apologies to everybody who is still in line, but I do want to thank the assembled ministers for their participation. And I want to thank AMO for having me back in the Ministers' Forum. Now I'm going to invite Minister Calandra back to the podium for some concluding remarks.

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