

### Freedom of information

**Mr. John Fraser:** My question is for the Premier, but before I get started, I read the news this morning, and between the Premier and the Solicitor General, there seems to be a lot going on in Home Depot parking lots. So maybe they could get their act together.

Last night, under the cover of darkness, this government was covering up the cover-up, rushing through the gutting of our rights to freedom of information in this province.

So Speaker, a simple question: Just what is the Premier trying to hide?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Do you want to know something, Madam Speaker? Maybe he should do his hotline up to Ottawa and ask. We're duplicating exactly what the federal government is doing. We're duplicating exactly what the federal government has done for 15 years, that he knows.

At the end of the day, 95% will be FOI, and that's no problem. FOI everything; I have no problem with that. But we're duplicating what your cousins are doing up in Ottawa. We're duplicating what every single province is doing across the country.

But there's a double standard. They say one thing and then they change their mind. They're prudent fiscal managers; then they're saying, "Why aren't we spending enough money?"

Again, we're seeing billions and billions of dollars being invested here because we've created the climate, the conditions, for countries around the world to come and invest and create thousands and thousands of new jobs.

No matter if it's mining or if it's our energy policies, we're leading the world. We're leading the world—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Back to the leader of the third party.

**Mr. John Fraser:** I'd just remind the Premier—it's not in his notes, but there are 9,000 fewer manufacturing jobs in this province than there were in 2018.

Here are the things we found out about this tired and out-of-control Ford government—things that we learned from freedom of information about these folks: the \$8.2-billion greenbelt scandal; the Skills Development Fund and millions of dollars for strip club owners, the Ford family dentist and ministers' best friends; and also the fact that the Premier and the Solicitor General can't seem to keep criminals behind bars. It's like the Keystone Kops over there. What's going on?

Ontarians know these things. They deserve to know these things. And after last night—actually, after lunchtime today—they won't.

So Speaker, back to the Premier: Just what is it you're trying to hide?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Again, I want the leader of the third party to call his hotline up to Ottawa and say the same thing to the Prime Minister or all their ministers.

And by the way, I actually agree with what they're doing up at the federal government because—try to get a cell number off the Prime Minister's line, or get it off one of their ministers, or get it as they just bought \$753 million of jets for their ministers. There seems to be a double standard going on.

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The other area—the leader of the third party says, “My dentist, my dentist.” I talked to him outside, and he goes, “I know it’s not your dentist, but it sounds good. That’s my job.”

So what’s he saying? One second, privately, he’s saying, “I know it’s not your dentist, but I’m going to say it anyway.” What credibility does he have? He has zero credibility. That’s what he’s all about. It’s politics.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Back to the leader of the third party.

**Mr. John Fraser:** So how did we get here? The Premier was ordered to turn over his personal cellphone records. He challenged it, it went to court and he lost—again.

The Premier needed a workaround, right? “I need a workaround.” I don’t know who he went to over there—maybe the finance minister—and he said, “We need to gut freedom-of-information laws. What can we do? We’ve got to hide it somewhere. We’ve got to bury it in the budget. We’ve got to make sure that people don’t see it.”

Then the Premier rips it out of committee without a word being spoken about the budget. Not a word—nada, zilch.

And last night, under the cover of darkness, he’s covering up the cover-up. And now, by lunchtime today, it will be law, and it will be retroactive. I know you know what that means Premier—retroactive.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Through the Speaker.

**Mr. John Fraser:** You’re changing the laws retroactively, so there must be something really, really, really bad on your cellphone. What is it?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** They want to get confidential constituents’ information, which is confidential, that we all swore an oath—we all swore an oath. When someone contacts you, you don’t advertise it on the front page of the papers and the news. They believe we should; we should break that confidentiality that we got elected on, that we swore an oath on.

But what we’re focused on—we’re focusing on the economy. We’re focusing on making sure that we’re creating hundreds of thousands of jobs—150,000 jobs on our nuclear build-out. By the way, we’re leading the G7. We’re leading the world. We’re leading the world when it comes to our critical minerals. We’re looking at tens of billions of dollars in the north because we’re moving forward, creating more jobs. We’re creating more manufacturing jobs than any time in the history of this province.

Again, Madam Speaker, we have seen \$230 billion invested in this province that has never, ever been done, ever—not the federal government, no other province except Ontario.

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**Mr. John Fraser:** Nice try, Premier. You bought a \$29-million jet while we’re half a trillion dollars in debt. But that’s not what this is about.

Let’s talk about the Premier’s phone records. The Premier does government business on his personal phone, and that’s wrong. He knows it, so why does he do it? Why does he do it, Speaker? He does it because he doesn’t want you to see the people who call him and text him, and what they have to say. Because it will show that the Premier—this government—treats

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taxpayers' money like it's his personal piggy bank. It's there for him to use to reward friends; wealthy, well-connected insiders; donors; whoever he chooses. He doesn't want you to see those things. That's why he does it on his personal phone. We have government phones for a reason. That's why you use them, Premier.

The real question here is, just what are you trying to hide, Premier?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** A parliamentary phone is not FOI-able.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Yes.

Well, let's talk about this again. We're focusing on jobs; we're creating jobs. We're adding more health care workers. We're adding 100,000 registered nurses, 20,000 doctors, and building 50 new hospitals or sites to the tune of \$60 billion. We're spending \$80 billion on creating the largest transit system expansion in North America.

We're spending \$30 billion on building roads, highways and bridges that they voted against. They don't believe in transit. They don't believe in increasing health care. We've increased health care, including long-term care, to \$100 billion. Let me put that into perspective, Madam Speaker: \$50 billion under them. No one has ever spent more money on front-line health care workers, on hospitals than this government.

We're going to continue supporting the people of Ontario as they have no solutions. They just sit there and talk and talk and talk.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Leader of the third party.

**Mr. John Fraser:** Speaker, the Premier's phone holds the proof and he doesn't want you to see it. It's proof of all his backroom deals—proof of favours for friends, proof of millions of dollars to a strip club owner. The Premier wants to do everything under the cover of darkness. He wants to sneak around on you. He wants to keep us in the dark.

Just how bad are the things on that phone that you've gone to this length to protect it?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** You know something? It's getting a little tiring, actually, listening to the leader of the third party go on and on and on about the plane and this and that.

Well, let me tell you, Madam Speaker—and I have no problem with this. I have no problem with this, but I'm the only Premier in the history of this province to fly commercial. As he was sitting there flying around with Dalton McGuinty—

Interjections.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Order.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** —on Dalton McGuinty's charter plane. He knows it. He flew on those planes endless and endless times, as I was trying to save the taxpayers money.

I sold the two planes which I—by the way, I have no problem with the previous Premiers flying around because it's part of the job. But unfortunately, when they were flying around, they were losing jobs. When I fly around, we're creating jobs. That is the difference.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the leader of the third party.

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**Mr. John Fraser:** Premier, you own the plane. You bought the plane. I know you think you sold it, but you own the decision, and I'm glad you're owning it right now, because you're not actually apologizing.

Speaker, this is how bad it is. We are gutting freedom-of-information laws, and we are doing it under the cover of darkness. They're going to cover up the cover-up, and it's being done at lightning speed. By lunchtime today, the Premier will think that he got away scot-free, just like those 150 criminals that he couldn't keep behind bars. But he should know he'll get apprehended—maybe not instantaneously, but we'll get him.

So why doesn't the Premier just surrender his cellphone records?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** When we're talking about criminals that administratively got out—do you know what I did, Madam Speaker? I looked before 2018, and there were hundreds and hundreds of people that got out under your watch. We looked at the numbers. But we're correcting the problem; they never corrected the problem.

By the way, Madam Speaker, with him and his buddy Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne, who spent millions and millions and millions of dollars on travel, as they spent millions and millions of dollars on meals and travelling around the world, guess what I spent? I spent nothing, zero. Let me see your expenses under Dalton McGuinty, your buddy, and Kathleen Wynne. I'll show you mine because I have spent nothing.

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**Ms. Marit Stiles:** When this Premier flies too close to the sun on his private jet, he changes the rules so he can do whatever he wants.

Thanks to FOIs—the freedom-of-information requests—we were able to learn how many taxpayer dollars this government spent—wasted—for example, on advertising for this harebrained Ontario Place scheme. Thanks to FOIs, we, the people, were able to find out what members of this government were doing when they were using code words to hide their greenbelt dealings. Thanks to FOIs, this Premier is under an RCMP criminal investigation for selling out the people of Ontario.

So I want to know, from the Premier: What are you hiding with these freedom-of-information changes?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Madam Speaker, I can tell you one thing: I give my phone number out to everyone, and everyone calls me. Now, I wouldn't go as low as the leader of the opposition, because she gave out my number to everyone—all her cronies, all the radical, left-wing loonies out there. She posted it—"Call him, call him." I wouldn't give her number out because she wouldn't answer a phone call. I encourage her to give my number out because I will deal with the issues at hand. That's the difference.

Again, no Premier in the history of this country has given his cell number out to actually help people, to talk to them about confidential information. I am sure if I told these people, "I'm going to post everything that you gave me," I'd have more lawsuits than you can shake a stick at because it's confidential. We swore an oath to protect any information coming from our constituents, unlike the leader of the—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The Leader of the Opposition.

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**Ms. Marit Stiles:** No Premier in the history of this country or this province has been under RCMP criminal investigation for selling out the people of the province, and that is why this Premier is changing the law. The Premier is changing the law to hide the details of his dealings with the greenbelt developers. And who knows what other schemes he's come up with.

I know that the Premier says he likes to hand out his cellphone number. He says, "Call me any time." Speaker, it was decided in a court of law—a court of law—that this Premier is using his personal cellphone to do government business. He has admitted it. He has admitted it, right now, just again, a million times. But now you're going through every possible hoop to avoid it.

I want to ask the Premier: Does he understand that when the RCMP comes—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Premier of Ontario.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Madam Speaker, we're going to focus on driving the economy. We're going to focus on fighting Donald Trump and the tariffs.

I'm down in the US, actually. I'm going to Utah to build relationships with governors. I'm going down to South Carolina to build relationships with governors to bring more businesses back, as they put blockades and barriers for businesses. And they want to increase taxes—all of them do. We've never increased taxes. Do you know something? We've actually put money back into peoples' pockets, until they can go out and maybe afford to go for dinner or even put a renovation on their home.

That's what we're doing. As all you do is sit there and chirp like a canary, all we do is keep saving taxpayers money.

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**MPP Stephanie Smyth:** Before coming to this House, I spent 30 years as a journalist. I know how critical freedom of information is, and those laws—how important they are to holding governments to account. They are how people get to the truth.

But now—and I know the Premier is tired of all the questions, but the time is limited on how much more we can ask, Premier. You're about to pass this legislation that limits access, that avoids public committee review, that makes it harder for Ontarians to see what's actually happening behind closed doors. The time is—

Interjections.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Order.

**MPP Stephanie Smyth:** This is coming from a Premier who recently went on live television, boasting about giving out his number, claiming to be open and accessible. Speaker, with a government that has a new scandal every week, Ontarians don't need a new number; they need transparency.

Speaker, to the Premier: Why does this Premier, who claims to be accountable, make it so very hard—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Premier of Ontario.

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**Hon. Doug Ford:** Do you know something, Madam Speaker? Do you know why the member is down here? It's because CP24 didn't want her anymore—bottom line, simple. That's why she's down here. She was just a promoter for a Liberal agenda, an NDP agenda when she was doing interviews. Do you think there could be anything else? That is the facts. That is the truth.

Interjections.

**Hon. Doug Ford:** It hurts, doesn't it? It hurts when you aren't wanted. There's a reason why you're—

Interjections.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Order.

The member for Don Valley North has been warned. The member for Toronto Centre has been warned. I'm cautioning people on the language and personal attacks.

Back to the member for Toronto—St. Paul's.

**MPP Stephanie Smyth:** Let's just talk about the cellphone again, Madam Speaker. He's happy to give out his number to anyone who asks, but he doesn't want Ontarians to see exactly what is on it. It sure seems like another stunt from this government. Say one thing on TV, post another on social media and then do the opposite behind closed doors.

So again, I'm going to ask the Premier: If he has nothing to hide, why is he working so hard to hide?

**Hon. Doug Ford:** Madam Speaker, do you know why I get more phone calls than anyone in the world? In the world—not North America, not Canada, in the world. Because I get phone calls from their ridings because they can't get a phone call back from the MPPs. I get it from their ridings. And guess what, Madam Speaker? I take care of every single person that calls me. Their issues—I take care of it. So again, that's the reason I give out my cellphone number.

What they want to do is take that weapon away from me because they know it hurts them. When I return every call—guess what? Do you know who they're voting for next time? They aren't voting for them; they're voting for us.

Because it's about customer service excellence. That's what we're focused on: returning phone calls, putting money back into peoples' pockets, creating more jobs, supporting our front-line health care workers, supporting our front-line educators with a \$750 purchasing card. That's what we focus on, but they're going to vote against it all today—watch.

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**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Has anyone ever watched Con Air? It's a 1990s film in which a bunch of criminals take over an airplane and use it to try and escape from prison. Con Air could have been the title of last week's multiple scandals in politics after we learned from a freedom-of-information request that the Premier lost 150 convicts, with six still on the loose, and at the same time tried to buy a \$29-million private jet for his personal use. It's the Con Air affair, folks.

Now, the captain of Con Air has said he's not sorry for losing the convicts. He hasn't really even said he's sorry for buying the airplane. What he has said sorry for is merely failing to communicate the purchase to Ontarians.

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What else has he failed to communicate? And is he rushing to change freedom-of-information laws so that we don't learn more about his Con Air affair?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The Minister of Finance.

Interjections.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you, colleagues.

Madam Speaker, I think the Premier, who answered, I think, 15 questions in the House—there's a common theme there. Do you know what the common theme is? That we're building Ontario: a \$1.2-trillion economy, a million more jobs, cutting taxes, making infrastructure investments, making investments in social infrastructure and making sure that this province prospers. Because you know what pays for all the infrastructure, the health care, the education, the social services and the colleges and the universities? It's the economy. It's the economy, stupid.

You have an opportunity on that side of the House. You have an opportunity to support Ontario, support this budget, vote for this budget. That's what you should be focusing on.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I'll ask the finance minister to withdraw.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** I withdraw—second time only.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member for Don Valley East.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** Madam Speaker, the Premier bought a \$29-million private jet without telling Ontarians, without putting it in the budget and without a plan.

The CBC is reporting that all Premiers in Confederation use commercial flights for their travel, with only infrequent use of chartered aircraft. Only one Premier bought his own plush, personal, private luxury jet so he could look down on Ontarians while he burns through their cash. That Premier got caught. So now, he's sorry—not for the purchase, but for his messaging.

Well, Ontarians have a message. They overwhelmingly oppose his changes to freedom-of-information laws, but the Premier is not listening. He skipped public hearings and he rushed through the debate last night under the cover of darkness. If the Premier is truly sorry, why is he ignoring Ontarians when they call on him to reverse his proposed changes to freedom-of-information laws?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Madam Speaker, it's the economy. It's the economy. I'll leave that other word out—that wasn't for the member. That was just general, that we've heard that before, and you forget that at your peril, Madam Speaker.

You know what? We did 35 consultations right across the province. We talked to the people of Ontario and debated this budget bill for months, putting everything out there, including in the House. And you know what? We had one message from the people of Ontario, and that is, people want us to get things done. They don't want us to just talk, talk, talk, which is what that member opposite is doing: talk, talk, talk.

This side of the House is act, act, act. That's what the people of Ontario want us to do. That's why we're going to vote for this budget.