

Red Dress Day

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Kiiwetinoong on a point of order.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House for a moment of silence to honour all missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people on this national day of awareness and remembrance, also known as Red Dress Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member from Kiiwetinoong is seeking unanimous consent of the House for a moment of silence to honour all missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people on this national day of awareness and remembrance known as Red Dress Day. Agreed? Agreed.

The House observed a moment's silence.

Student assistance

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Last week, the Premier took some time to fly a private plane down to Michigan, collect a free degree and address a group of American students.

But there's a group of students that this Premier won't face, a group of students that this Dr. Premier has turned his back on. They are the students here in the province of Ontario, the same students whose future he is destroying with his cuts to OSAP.

What's up, Doc? Why is this Premier giving speeches to American students in Michigan, but refusing to speak to students here at home?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question, and I know that the parliamentary assistant will be pleased to take the supplementary.

Yesterday, we saw the Leader of the Opposition invoke dangerous American-style Trumpian rhetoric that, quite frankly, has no place in this Legislature—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the government House leader.

I'm warning members now. The behaviour will be respectful in the chamber, or members will be warned and asked to leave.

You may continue.

Hon. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. Again, through you, that type of rhetoric lowers the tone in this House. It has no place in this Legislature, our province or our country.

I want to make it very clear what the Premier is focused on. He's focused on this generational threat that we have with the Americans on the tariffs. We will continue to focus on the economy and on jobs. That's the Premier's mandate. That's our government's mandate.

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

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Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, Speaker, pretty rich coming from a government that is under RCMP criminal investigation.

I'll go back to the Premier on this. On this side of the House, when there were thousands of students assembled on the front lawns just outside, we went out and we met with them. We spoke to them. We listened to them.

But the Premier, he hid. He refused to show his face in person. Instead, he went to the media. He insulted students. He told them what classes they should and shouldn't take, as if he had aced a single college class.

Can the Premier tell us, during his speech to the American students in Michigan, did he insult those American students in the same way that he insulted the students here at home?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Whitby.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Our new grant-to-loan ratio is right in line with other provinces. OSAP loans are not like standard bank loans. These loans do not accrue interest while the student is in school. There is a six-month grace period on repayment after graduation, and the interest that does accrue is extremely low, at prime plus 1%.

On top of that, Speaker, our government offers numerous programs that financially support students, like the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant, which, since its introduction, has provided over \$173 million to cover the tuition—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Spadina–Fort York has been warned.

Continue.

Mr. Lorne Coe: —books and other educational costs of more than 12,800 nursing, medical lab and paramedic students across Ontario.

Speaker, higher education is an investment students make in themselves and their future. Our government will—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: That response just shows you again that this government is not listening to students or families. If the Premier had listened to students in Ontario, he would have heard from the thousands who are dropping out of school because of his OSAP cuts: regular working people whose plans are shot, whose choices are either drop out now or take on decades of debt.

While he's jetting off to the US to get a free degree—which is, by the way, nice for him, but not so nice for the people of Ontario who are footing the bill for that—here's the kicker: We have record unemployment for youth in the province of Ontario. Some 700,000 Ontarians are unemployed right now, and it is one in five young people.

So tell us, Premier: When are you going to stand up for students here at home and reverse your OSAP cuts?

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Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, when we took office, Ontario had the highest tuition in Canada, a direct result of the previous Liberal government hiking tuition by 48%. Now, our government cut tuition by 10%, and we froze it, making post-secondary education more affordable for students and hard-working families across the province.

Now the landscape has changed, largely because of destabilizing federal policy decisions that have shaken the post-secondary systems across Canada. That's why we're allowing institutions to increase tuition by up to 2%, keeping Ontario among the lowest tuition growth rates in the country.

And let me be clear, absolutely clear: Low-income students will see this increase fully covered through our enhanced student access guarantee, ensuring—

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

Education funding

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Minister of Education. Madam Speaker, parents in Ottawa have some basic expectations. They expect clean classrooms, they expect safe buildings and they expect, when their child turns on the tap at school, that the water will be safe to drink.

But across the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, multiple schools have reported dangerous levels of lead in drinking water. And today, we learn that while they're still managing those risks, the board is planning to lay off custodians and tradespeople, the very men and women who are charged with maintaining and cleaning our schools. At the exact moment when parents and the system need confidence to be restored, the government is allowing people to be laid off.

Madam Speaker, at a time when Ottawa schools are dealing with water safety issues, how can the government justify cutting the very staff who maintain these schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, I think the member actually has his facts wrong. Of course, across the province of Ontario, we're making significant investments in schools. In fact, just last week, we announced a historic, frankly, \$1.6-billion investment in schools, which is about 179 new schools which will be built across the province of Ontario.

Of course, that compares favourably, because the Liberals, as you all recall, were closing schools across the province of Ontario. While they were closing them, we are building them.

Part of that is also upgrading 132 other schools. Every part of this province is receiving either a new build or repair.

It also includes over 10,000 child care spaces, Madam Speaker. Now, what this means is better facilities for our students, state-of-the-art facilities for our teachers to teach in. But it also means thousands of jobs as we've accelerated the pace of construction across the province of Ontario so that we can keep more people working in every part of the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: Again, to the Minister of Education: Clean classrooms, safe buildings, water parents can trust—these are the basics that confidence is based on, Madam Speaker. But in

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Ottawa, that confidence is shaken. Schools have unsafe levels of lead in the drinking water, posing real health concerns for their kids, and parents are rightly concerned about that.

Custodians who work late into the night to keep schools clean, to ensure that they're safe—safe for learning, safe for community use—are the very people that this government is allowing to be laid off by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

How can parents have confidence in school safety when the government is allowing cuts to the very men and women who are charged with keeping our schools clean and safe?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll agree with the member on one thing: Trust in Ottawa was hard to come by when the trustees were in charge of that system, Madam Speaker.

In fact, parents were in an absolute uproar because of the changes that trustees had been proposing that they were not in agreement with and that they had not been consulted on. And parents were showing that disfavour: Over a thousand of their kids were going to the Catholic system in Ottawa. Now we're starting to see a reverse of that trend as the supervisor in that area starts to bring back confidence. There is obviously less infighting that is happening in that system.

We're building on that by building new schools in Ottawa. In the member's own community, there will be some new schools. But it's also 179 additional schools with over \$1.6 billion across the province of Ontario, 10,000 child care spaces so that more people can have access to a space, Madam Speaker. It's thousands of jobs being created as we build these new schools.

While they were closing schools, we're building new spaces for our teachers, students and parents so that we can have state-of-the-art facilities and we can unleash the economic activity that is so important in so many parts of this province.

Notice of dissatisfaction

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Orléans has given a notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Education regarding staff cuts in Ottawa. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.