

Government accountability (Bill 33)

Ms. Chandra Pasma: On top of trying to create special law-free zones and shutting down parliamentary debate on seven different bills, this government has tabled a bill that will allow the Minister of Education to take over school boards whenever he wants, with no limits or oversight. Our kids don't need more centralized control in the hands of a government that has already taken \$6.35 billion out of the education system. They need teachers, books, and safe and healthy schools.

Will the Premier withdraw this Trumpian bill and instead make the investments that our kids need to succeed?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? The Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The short answer is, no, I won't withdraw the bill. because it's a good bill, Madam Speaker. Colleagues, do you think it's a good bill?

Interjections.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think it's a good bill. I think the people of the province of Ontario, starting with students, parents and teachers, want the government to assume responsibility for the issues that are their responsibility, mainly making sure that funding that is supposed to go for kids in the classroom goes to—go figure—kids in the classroom.

Who here would ever believe that the government shouldn't take responsibility for an investment of over \$30.5 billion in education? When school boards aren't going to do the things that they're supposed to do; namely, put money into the classroom—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I apologize to the member.

I would ask the member to put the newspaper down. Put the newspaper down.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. Back to the Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll just leave it at that, Madam Speaker. We're not going to withdraw the bill. It is a good bill. It puts power back into the hands of the people of the province of Ontario as opposed to those school boards which have really gone off the tracks, off the rails. I don't apologize for that. We're doing what is right for the students, parents and teachers of the province of Ontario.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: You know what the people of the province of Ontario want to see, Speaker? They want to see that \$6.5 billion returned to our education system. Parents want to have a say in the decisions that affect their kids' schools, but this minister is taking that away from them and giving himself the power to push aside democratically elected school boards for literally any reason he feels like. A Conservative government appointee, with no accountability to parents or communities, making all the decisions about local schools without talking to anyone, isn't going to solve a single thing.

Will the Premier respect parents, respect democracy and withdraw this bill?

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Hon. Paul Calandra: No, Madam Speaker. You know why? Because only the NDP and the Liberals would stand up for school boards that think it's their responsibility to travel the world and buy artwork. I will fire those trustees that do that, because that's the right thing to do. But the NDP and the Liberals, they work for them. So, when school boards take money out of the classroom, it's ok for the Liberals and it's ok for the NDP. It's not ok for us. When boards do that, I'll take them over because that's the right thing to do.

As I said in the news conference, I don't need school boards or trustees writing curriculum. I don't need them opining on global affairs. You know what I need them doing? Sitting at their desk putting money back into the classroom. Anything else, I don't need them to do. When they stray from that mandate, you know what? We'll assume that board, we'll fire the trustees that abuse taxpayer money, and we'll put students, parents and teachers first all the time. Let them stand against that.

Education

Mr. Matthew Rae: My question is to the Minister of Education.

We have tabled a very important piece of legislation. As an expecting father, I want to ensure that my future child has a great world-class education system for generations to come. So I was wondering if the Minister of Education could tell how our government will continue to stand up for teachers, parents and students, most importantly.

Interjections: Prop. Prop.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I don't know what—honestly, I've been called a lot of things, but I've never been called a prop, colleagues.

What a tough but fair question from the member who really, honestly—more importantly, I know how important education is to him and to his constituents. As an expectant father, I know that he only wants to do the best.

But what can I say? If the whip asks me to do something, there is zero chance that I'm not going to make sure that the education system is the best in the world, because he decides how long I sit in this place on a daily basis, Madam Speaker. So, for him, I will do whatever he needs me to do.

Children's mental health services

Ms. Catherine Fife: Results from a 2022 survey show that over four years, students' mental and physical health have plunged across Waterloo region. The leading culprit? Social media platforms. University of Waterloo professor Dr. Dillon Browne, who specializes in child mental health, says there are "significant correlations between the amount of child engagement with social media and things like anxiety and depression."

This is a trend across the province, with several Ontario school boards launching lawsuits against social media platforms claiming they hurt students by interfering with their mental health and their learning. Addictive design features like endless scrolling, algorithmic content and notifications are deliberately engineered to keep users engaged, especially vulnerable youth. Ontario's public health units have a role to play by implementing clear evidence-based warnings about the health risks of excessive social media use, similar to warnings we see on tobacco and alcohol.

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That is why I am putting forth a motion calling on this government to investigate the harmful impact of social media on youth and to implement stronger protections across the province. Our children's well-being must come before corporate profits.

I call on all members of this House to support this motion to protect Ontario's next generation from the harms of social media, and I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Allison Young for her leadership and bringing forward this issue. Let's get this done together.

Youth employment

Ms. Doly Begum: Young Ontarians are at the sharpest edge of both the housing and employment crisis. They're caught in the middle of soaring rents, impossible home prices and a job market that's shutting them out. Students and young adults across Ontario are looking for jobs to earn much-needed income, income they rely on to carry them through the rest of the year. But this year, their search is even more difficult. According to Statistics Canada, in February 2025, Ontario had the third-highest youth unemployment rate in the country. A staggering 15.5% of youth aged 15 to 24 were out of work.

We hear from young people in our communities who tell us how hard it is to find work and how this uncertainty weighs heavily on their mental health. They're doing everything right—pursuing education, applying for jobs and showing up every day with determination—and yet they're being left behind.

This is a critical moment to invest in our youth by creating opportunities that not only help them with their current economic struggles but also help them build their careers. However, instead of responding with urgency, this government's budget missed that moment. It failed to invest meaningfully in programs or pathways to employment that would help young people build a future with stability and hope. Youth in this province are working hard to get ahead. They need a government that's working just as hard for them.

Steve Paikin

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Mr. Steve Clark: If you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow members to pay tribute to Steve Paikin, with five minutes allotted to the official opposition, five minutes allotted to the third party, two minutes allotted to the independent members as a group and five minutes allotted to the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Mr. Clark is seeking unanimous consent to allow members to pay tribute to Steve Paikin, with five minutes allotted to the official opposition, five minutes allotted to the third party, two minutes allotted to the independent members as a group and five minutes allotted to the government. Agreed? Agreed.

I recognize the member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Steve Paikin has been a fixture in the homes of Ontarians. Since 1992, he's been a trusted source for news, and while The Agenda is coming to an end, we are grateful that we will continue to hear from him on TVO, through his column and on his podcast. But it's appropriate that after 19 seasons of The Agenda, we mark this occasion and thank Steve for his service to this Legislature and to Ontarians.

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While politicians have come and gone from this Legislature, he has been a constant. He has worked to ensure that people get the information that they need and hear the perspectives of people from across the political spectrum. When the business in this House has gotten tense, when we've dealt with complex and technical matters, and especially when the various parties have disagreed on basic facts, people have counted on Steve to make this place make sense. Steve, we need you to make this place make sense.

There are not a lot of programs in this province that provide deep dives into the important topics of the day. Steve has said before that no topic is too complex to be discussed on The Agenda, and taking on that challenge has undoubtedly helped to elevate the tone and better inform the political discourse within the province. While many places around the world, including in Canada, are becoming more polarized, Steve's reporting certainly shares some of the credit for resisting that trend in our own communities.

I know that I've tuned into his programs to help me get a broader perspective on the current affairs of the province—to make sure I don't get caught in that echo chamber, because even when we have disagreements, the conversations that Steve leads encourage healthy dialogue and debate. It's a hard job. Many of the people in this chamber have likely gone to him with a bone to pick about how something was reported, but we also recognize that we are fortunate to have reporters covering this Legislature with good judgment and in good faith.

It's a particular credit to the trust that people have in him—that all parties in this House believe in him—that he's so often selected as a moderator of the debates that people rely on to inform their votes. I think we've all seen political debates that have likely left people more confused and more angry than when they started. It takes strong leadership and the respect of everyone involved in the debate to keep things on track, and Steve meets that standard. He really is one of the best moderators we have in Ontario, and we hope that he will continue to serve in that role for many years to come.

Steve is more than just an exceptional journalist. He's a community leader and an author, having written about Canadian historical figures, the nature of politics in Canada and public life—and even hockey.

In 2022, I had the opportunity to provide a tribute to a family friend of the Paikins, Marv Shore, the former MPP for London North. I recommend to all members in the chamber that they read that article. One of the parts I liked best was how the Paikin boys all call each other "Marv." They call their father Larry "Marv." Steve's kids call him "Marv" to this very day. It speaks to the mark that some people have on us, on our lives and on our hearts. It's also really a testament to him that he was able to capture the life of a person that he loved in such a wonderful way.

We look forward to seeing what else you do with your extra time, Steve—maybe even more books about hockey, hopefully.

So thank you again, Steve, for what you've already done for our province and for what we know you will continue to contribute.

And to you, Steve: Marv Shore, London North.

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

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Mr. John Fraser: I hope everybody bears with me. I got a little bit of late notice—no complaints—this morning. Some CP reporters know that because I texted notes to who I thought was my staff, and they got it. So I'm sorry that you got the heads-up.

I was struggling because there's so much to say. I thought I'd phone a friend, so I called my wife, Linda, this morning and I said, "Look, I've got all this great stuff about Steve, but I'm really struggling. I've got a problem." I said, "I've been here almost 12 years and I've never, ever been invited to The Agenda. All my colleagues—everybody; even the new ones—okay?" And then she stopped, and she said, "John, you know I love you." I said, "Yes." She said, "You're just not that interesting." She's right—but now that he's gone, I've got a sliver of a chance of getting on.

Thanks, Steve. You're so much a part of this place, so much a part of the history, and not the history that people would always read about, talking about things that affect leaders, what their lives are like and the things that they sacrifice—the things that people sacrifice in here. It is really important. It is important to us that people see that and acknowledge it. Not everybody's going to read that; I know that. But that side of politics: It's really important to all of us. That's why we're all here; we're here for the right reasons.

And chronicling things like Bill Davis, who I have a deep, deep respect for, the kind of sacrifices that he made; John Robarts; Dalton McGuinty; and John Turner, who, not in this place, was somebody who was really important to me throughout my career—I won't go into the reasons right now. You never made yourself the news, and I think that that's sometimes hard to do when you're in a position of profile like that. You made the history the news, the people the news, how people really were. And that's, I think, such an important part of Ontario politics.

You did so much too—have done so much, I should say—just moderating debates, which I don't think I could do, and you've done it in a way that has been really beneficial to our democracy. That's a huge contribution.

I'm not going to use all this time, because the member from Toronto—St. Paul's would like to say a few words. But on behalf of our party, I'd just like to thank you for your contributions. I know you're going to continue to contribute more. We really appreciate the genuine interest that you take in the people who work in this place, the people who put their name on a ballot, and in the human way that you've told their stories. I think that's really important.

And I can't wait to get on The Agenda.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Toronto—St. Paul's.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you, Speaker. I'm looking up there for someone named Parker, not Steve, because this person Steve Paikin was known as Parker—i.e., the reporter in Spider-Man, the earnest reporter—back in the day when he was at CHFI and CFTR as a city hall reporter; and back then, I don't know, 40-some-odd years ago, as earnest and amazing as we see today as he was then.

We know that we could all learn a lot from Parker—or Steve Paikin. We know that leaders' debates are better because of him: the ability, the knowledge and the civility he brings to them. Politicians, as I said, could learn a lot from him, and maybe some of us have. When I first talked to Steve about possibly going into politics a few years back, he advised me to read one of his books. He said it was on sale for two bucks online.

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But, to me, Steve, your knowledge is absolutely invaluable, and the Legislature needs more people like you to help us understand what we do. Your dedication is parallel to no one, really. You are a scholar, you're a gentleman, and I, too, was never on The Agenda, but maybe you and Mr. J.M. McGrath can get us on #onpoli at some point in time.

I just have to say to you, through my husband: We still love you, even though you're a Ti-Cats fan. Oskee Wee Wee.

Thank you, Steve, for all you do. You're amazing.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I was on The Agenda.

The member for Guelph.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: You know, Speaker, it's a pretty special day when you have an opportunity to pay tribute to an extraordinary journalist, author and all-around great guy in Steve Paikin. I can tell you, for a political nerd like me, The Agenda is a staple in our house and has been for 19 years. I'm looking forward to continuing to see Steve on the #onpoli podcast.

I have a personal connection and gratitude to Steve, not only because he lets the entire world know Elizabeth May and I share June 9 as a birthday with Steve Paikin, but also because I have been on The Agenda.

I've got to tell you this story, though. After the 2014 election, I told Steve I thought I performed well enough that the Greens should be on The Agenda more—or at least on for once—and he said to me, scrupulously non-partisan, "I cannot make that decision, but I will allow you to convince the entire Agenda staff." So I went in, gave a speech, and they all voted to allow Greens to be on The Agenda, I think just to stick it to the member from Ottawa South.

Thank you, Steve, for a great—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Haldimand–Norfolk.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Congratulations, and all the best to the illustrious Steve Paikin. As a broadcast journalism student, I've always looked up to Steve, who delivers genuinely, is known for fairness, impartiality and, indeed, keen interviewing skills. Recognized for his ability to engage and inform viewers on a broad range of public policy issues, Steve has undoubtedly been a significant contributor to public discourse in Canada.

I have a cute story. After the 2022 election, when I first saw Steve here at Queen's Park for the first time, he was a bit shy about admitting to me that, on election night, when Haldimand–Norfolk came across the screen, he said something to the effect of "Keep moving. That can't be right. We'll come back to Haldimand–Norfolk in a bit." Of course, in true Steve Paikin style, he apologized profusely and has since made it up to me, especially after the most recent election—yes, on The Agenda.

I wish you well, Steve, and I thank you for being an incredible person and voice in Ontario politics. All the best.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Education.

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Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the opportunity to say goodbye, I suppose, temporarily, to Steve Paikin.

I would say this, Madam Speaker: When a renowned journalist on a state-run news channel is told that they're going to retire, there is literally a Conservative stampede to the door of everybody that wants to wish them goodbye. I got there first.

It's no secret that, when I was in Ottawa, of course, we rallied and talked—still did—about getting rid of the CBC. Imagine my horror when I found out that, as Minister of Education, I run my own state broadcast.

I'll say that everybody has talked about all of the good things that he's done, and I would say this—he probably would agree; probably nobody knows this. One of my favourite Christmas cartoons is The Year Without a Santa Claus. There's a guy named Snow Miser in this commercial. He's a really good guy. He's really charismatic. Steve, you always remind me of Snow Miser. I don't know why.

But there is one person—and I'm going to look directly at the camera. There is one person right now who is watching, I know. He lives in a gated community in Markham, and he is horrified right now that I am doing the goodbye to Steve Paikin, because every single day for 18 years, this gentleman has sent me an email: "Steve Paikin said this. Why don't you do this?" So, guess who's saying goodbye, my friend? That's right; it's me.

Now, I think I was invited on The Agenda, but I would never go on The Agenda and I'm happy it's coming to an end, to be honest—only because, I will say this—and he's doing it probably right now. He has this look about him when he knows that you're ragging the puck or you're just trying to do something. He's got this look about him that is a half smile, half "I know what you're doing," and I've never wanted to be put in that position. So I thought, "I'm just not doing it. I'm not going to go on the channel and I'm not going to do that."

But Steve, I will say this, because I'm the only one who will say it: Everybody is thinking you've won lots of awards, you've done an amazing job, been a great broadcaster, according to a lot of people. I always thought you sucked.

I'm just kidding. I just wanted to see who applauded to that.

The others have touched on it, though, but just think about this for a second. Think about the anchor of TVOntario being asked to host national leaders' debates. Just think about that for a second and how amazing that is. I know the people in other parts of the country are saying, "Who the heck is this guy?" And it is, I think, something that we should all be quite proud of—the fact that that is the case. I am very proud of that, to be honest, and you've always done such a great job.

They talk about your starting off at 680 CFTR. I used to wake up to CFTR when it was a radio station. It's not anymore, obviously. I didn't know it still existed, but God bless them.

You have done an amazing job. We're all very proud of all that you have accomplished in this place. And I say in a very real sense, you and I are alike in a lot of ways. We both love this place. We love the people who are in this place—some more than others, to be honest with you—and we are very jealous and guarded of not only this place, but what Parliament represents. You have been one of those people that helps us once in a while remember how

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important it is to be here. The personalities that have shaped not only this place but the province of Ontario—you're the one who's given voice to a lot of that very often in the books that you have written, that all of us have read and enjoyed. That, I think, more than anything for me, is your legacy, that you have been jealously guarded of how important it is to be in this place.

Now, I know you have an Italian wife, so what I have done for you—I do have some sandals and socks in the back and an Italian undershirt so that you can start tending the garden. I know that your tomatoes should be spectacular.

But can you imagine being Paikin's neighbour in retirement? Just imagine this: You go over the fence, you're talking, and he's going to start moderating and looking at you in that way. It would be the worst place to live because you would have Ontario's pre-eminent journalist right there all of the time. Usually, you have to die in order to get this type of a tribute.

I'll break one little piece of news, and then I'll sit down and say thank you. His family is across the political spectrum; they've worked for everybody. But, so everybody knows, Steve Paikin actually is a Progressive Conservative supporter—no, I'm just kidding. To the man in Markham, he is a Conservative. He has probably turned the TV off in anger—no, he has not.

Honestly, thank you so much for everything you've done. Congratulations. I know you're just retiring from one program, but you have done an amazing job for the people of the province of Ontario, and we are honoured to have had you for so long. Thank you so much.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Steve, if you would like to experience the debate in the chamber from a different vantage point, please feel free to join us from the Speaker's gallery down below. It's a little bit of a different perspective. You're more than welcome.