

Special-needs students

Mr. Stephen Blais: Madam Speaker, last year a beautiful young girl in Ottawa named Juliet, who has Down syndrome, thrived in French immersion. With proper EA support, she succeeded academically. She earned awards. She showed exactly what true inclusion looks like when children are given the chance to achieve their best.

This year, it's completely different. Because of funding shortfalls, her school can only provide 30 minutes of support a day. And without that support, her teacher now gives her colouring pages, not math, so that she has something to do while the other children learn.

Her father said it in a way that none of us should forget: "She went from thriving to being just a bum in a seat." That's not inclusion. That's not dignity. That's not the education Ontario promises every child.

Madam Speaker, when will the Premier provide the funding needed to ensure students like Juliet receive real, meaningful support to flourish, not colouring sheets just to keep them busy?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I appreciate the question because it's exactly what we've been talking about now for weeks. We want an education system that focuses on students, parents and teachers and provides the necessary resources. That is, in part, why in his area we fired the school trustees: because they were spending too much time fighting each other and not enough time focusing on what's important, student achievement.

As I've said on numerous occasions, it doesn't matter that we're funding education to the highest level. It doesn't matter that we've hired thousands of teachers and EAs and support. What matters is the results that we're getting out of our education system.

And it is exactly why we brought in Bill 33. Unfortunately, an arrogant and out-of-touch Liberal party voted against that bill. It allows me to step in on behalf of parents, students and teachers to ensure that all kids have access to the highest level of education. It shouldn't matter who you are or what your level is, everybody deserves the right to have an education system that is focused on them. For far too long, that was not the case in the province of Ontario, and that's where we're going to double down to make sure we maximize resources for students, parents and teachers.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Orléans.

Mr. Stephen Blais: We need to be honest about the situation in Ottawa because Juliet's parents don't need spin, and Juliet won't benefit from a blame game.

Two of this government's most senior political operatives—the deputy chief of staff to the Premier, and the chief of staff to the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery—are both trustees on the Ottawa Catholic School Board, the school board Juliet attends. If the Premier insists on blaming the board, or the minister does, they are in fact blaming their own senior political operatives. Even with that level of political influence on the Ottawa board, they cannot provide the funding for special education that children like Juliet need and deserve.

Madam Speaker, how can the Premier, or his minister, look parents in the eye and pretend that this is acceptable? Will he finally admit that the system is chronically underfunded, and is

leaving children with disabilities to effectively be bums in seats instead of students in a classroom?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member should know—when I was in his community just last Friday, when we announced significant resources for all of the boards there to build on to additional schools and to expand others—that what we are focused on is ensuring that there are maximized resources for classroom education. I actually have said on a number of occasions that what I want is for parents to hold me accountable: hold the Minister of Education accountable for showing leadership back in the Ministry of Education.

Interjection.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Now, if an arrogant, out-of-touch Liberal from Ottawa would stop yacking, as he is right now—he should be embarrassed, right? He should be embarrassed because the leader of the Liberal Party failed students. He made schools unsafe. It was him who took police out of our schools to make them unsafe. It was he who closed down 600 schools across the province of Ontario.

When health care was suffering in Ottawa, what did he do? He closed hospitals, fired nurses and couldn't get the job done. Arrogant, out of touch, ineffective is the history of the Liberal Party of Ontario. We'll bring it all back—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Food banks / Banques alimentaires

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Premier.

Yesterday, I asked the Premier if we could take all that surplus American booze and sell it off and give it to our food banks—all that booze that's bought and paid for that's collecting dust? We ain't getting a refund for it; it's not happening. So we can sell it off and do good, like Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and PEI.

It's Christmas, folks, and we don't always agree, as we can see in here. But there's a chance for us to do something good right now, for all of us to agree—all of us. But the irony of it is, it's not all of us who can make it happen. It's one of us—and that one of us is the Premier. He can make it happen.

So I'm going to ask the Premier again this morning: Will you sell off that surplus American alcohol that's collecting dust and use it to make sure that children and their families won't go hungry this Christmas?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Peterborough–Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: Donald Trump took aim at Ontario's economy with those unjustified tariffs, and our government has removed US-made alcohol as a response to that. It's because we stand with the workers in Colborne, in Carlisle, and in Carrying Place who make Ontario cider. We don't stand with those workers in Catskill, New York. We stand with the people who work in craft breweries in Bowmanville and Brockville. But we do not stand with the craft brewers in Boston, Massachusetts. We stand with the workers, the grape growers and the wine producers in Niagara. We do not stand for the people in Napa Valley, California.

This government will stand and protect the workers of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Ottawa—Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: À Ottawa, les banques alimentaires font face à une hausse de 101 % des visites depuis 2019, dont 37 % sont des enfants. Les banques alimentaires sont essentielles, mais elles manquent cruellement d'un soutien et depuis trop longtemps.

Pendant ce temps, le gouvernement laisse 80 millions de dollars d'alcool américain dormir dans des entrepôts, dont 2 millions de dollars seront périmés d'ici la fin du mois—une totale perte.

Nos banques alimentaires jouent un rôle vital dans nos communautés. Elles constituent un véritable filet de sûreté pour les milliers de familles et elles ont aujourd'hui, plus que jamais, besoin d'un financement adéquat de la part de ce gouvernement.

Les Ontariens ont besoin d'aide maintenant. Est-ce que le gouvernement va vendre ce stock excédentaire et utiliser les produits pour soutenir nos banques alimentaires?

Mr. Dave Smith: I understand that sometimes the opposition comes up with ideas that they think are going to help people in Ontario, when actually, what they're talking about is something that's going to cause more problems for the people of Ontario.

We know that the Trump tariffs have taken direct aim at the economy in Ontario.

This government, this Premier, will stand with the workers of Ontario—we're not going to abandon those, because we know that we've seen an increase of VQA sales of 79%. That is workers in Niagara Falls, in Prince Edward county, who have jobs today, who have the ability to buy the things they need to buy for their families, because we are standing behind and supporting the workers of Ontario.

We'll continue to stand behind all of those people in Ontario who deserve that support from us.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Final supplementary?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: I have two food banks in my riding: the Kanata Food Cupboard and the West Carleton Food Access Centre—amazing people doing amazing things for their neighbours. They're supported by volunteers in the broader community. This year, food bank usage is up 25% in my riding.

My question to the Premier: If Manitoba, Nova Scotia, PEI, Newfoundland and Labrador can do it, why can we not sell our surplus American liquor that we've already paid for and put that money to good use to help people this holiday season?

Mr. Dave Smith: The reality is, there are more wineries in Niagara Falls than Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and PEI combined—and those are Ontario workers.

What the Liberals are suggesting is that our government turn its back on the hard-working people in this province and say to them, "I'm sorry, at the time of year when there is more alcohol—more of your product—being sold, we think it should be taken off the shelf. We think that the American products should be put instead."

What they don't understand, is that every bottle of Julio Gallo sold at Christmas means a bottle of VQA Ontario is not; every bottle of Samuel Adams sold means a bottle of Canadian Ontario

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craft beer remains on the shelf—and every single one of those workers in that industry in Ontario would be harmed because of it.

We will stand with the workers of Ontario.

Food banks

Mr. Adil Shamji: In and around Don Valley East, there are 25 food banks—25. Each week, the lines at these food banks grow longer, breaking records that were really only set the week before. That's 25 food banks, amongst hundreds across our province, where one in three visitors are going for the first time, one in three are children, and one in four could not earn enough to make ends meet, even if they already had a job. There were 8.7 million food bank visits last year, of which 30% were from children.

The Premier says he wants to stand up for workers. Stand up for these people. Our province sits on \$80 million of liquor, some of which is set to expire. It's already bought and paid for.

Will the Premier sell this unused inventory so that we can take all of that revenue and use it to support food banks, so families in my riding don't go hungry this Christmas?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Member for Peterborough—Kawartha.

Mr. Dave Smith: What we're doing is we're supporting the people of Ontario—those hard-working individuals who are trying to make sure that they can make ends meet. What the Liberals are suggesting is that we tell them that we're going to turn our backs on all of those individuals who work in that industry. We're going to tell them that we don't want to sell their product—because we know that for every bottle of California wine sold, a bottle of Ontario wine is not; we know that for every New York state cider sold, an Ontario cider is not, and it remains on the shelf.

We want to make sure that the people who are working in Ontario continue to work in Ontario.

We will continue to support all of those jobs because it's the right thing to do.

We will stand with the workers in Ontario.

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

Mr. Stephen Blais: As we approach Christmas, food insecurity in Ottawa is reaching levels we've never seen. The Ottawa Hunger Report shows nearly 600,000 food bank visits last year, an all-time high.

In Orléans, one of the most affluent parts of the province, the situation is just as alarming. The Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre's food bank now serves more than 1,200 people every month, half of which are children. That is a 34% increase in the last two years.

While families and children are relying on food banks at record levels, this government is sitting on tens of millions of dollars in US liquor, \$2 million of which is about to be poured down the drain.

Madam Speaker, families are going hungry. This government is letting liquor go bad. So will the government sell that US alcohol that is surplus, that has already been paid for, and use the proceeds to help food banks and help families this Christmas?

Mr. Dave Smith: I appreciate the question.

I'll keep coming back to this: Our government is exploring every opportunity that we have to support the workers of Ontario. We want to make sure that what we do lifts those people up.

We know that if you take an American product and support American industry—even if it is good-hearted on their part—what you're doing is, you're harming Ontario workers.

We're not going to turn our back on the people of this province who are working hard to pay their bills. We're not going to turn our back and take away their opportunities. We're not going to say that Americans deserve more than Ontarians do. That is not the approach that we're going to take.

We will explore whatever opportunity we have to make sure that the people of this province get what they need and our workers are supported.

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

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Madam Speaker, I'm overwhelmed by the poppycock I'm hearing over there. We are trying to help families going hungry in this province.

Do you know what? Three food banks in Toronto—St. Paul's: Churches on-the-Hill, Hillcrest Community Food Bank, Avenue Road Food Bank—a 20% increase in demand. These are people who are bringing their families, people who are working. These are people who are lining up every day for help.

This is to the Premier: Am I hearing properly that this government would rather pour \$80 million down the drain than give that to food banks and people going hungry in this province?

Mr. Dave Smith: Let's talk about reality here. Spirits do not go bad. So if the member opposite wants to talk poppycock—she should stop talking about the numbers that she's giving.

What we are doing as a government is we're standing behind the hard-working people in Niagara Falls, the hard-working people in Prince Edward county, the hard-working people in Bruce county and in every district across this province, to make sure that those individuals who are seeing a benefit because we've taken US alcohol off the shelves continue to have that benefit—because there is nothing better for them than knowing that they have the security of their job.

Madam Speaker, we will continue to support the workers in Ontario. We'll continue to make sure that we're doing things to lift people up in this province. And we will make no apologies for saying that American-produced product is not something that we're going to put on the shelf.

Season's greetings

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Point of order: I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, before the session ends, I really want to take a moment to thank everybody here, and the people that keep us going here in the Legislature.

I want to first start by thanking my team, my caucus. The incredible official opposition shadow cabinet here and our House team in particular, thank you for everything you have done every single day in this very short, condensed and intense session.

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I want to thank the official opposition staff. They are the engine that keeps all of us going, helping us hold the government to account and serve the people who we represent.

I want to thank the hard-working assembly staff, starting with you, Madam Speaker. The Clerks, the broadcast and recording and translation services, the press gallery—all of you—the counsel, librarians, kitchen and maintenance staff. Thank you all. I really do want to wish you a restful and safe holiday.

I want to thank our pages, who are an incredible team. Can I just say, you are amazing. I feel like we're going to be seeing you back here in these seats one day.

Speaker, the work doesn't stop today. I truly look forward to hitting the road tomorrow and for the next couple of months, meeting Ontarians where they're at and bringing their voices back to Queen's Park here in the spring.

Happy holidays. I hope everyone has a safe and happy holiday. Thank you.

Applause.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of our caucus to say a few words of thanks for this place, for all of you, even though it doesn't seem that way sometimes. We're all here. We're all trying to do the best that we can—I believe.

I want to thank our caucus in particular, especially Lucille, who puts up with me—the member from Ottawa–Vanier, I'm sorry—not that I'm singling anybody out. *Mon ange gardienne est du côté*, right? These folks are my guardian angels. They keep me—they have a hard time sometimes, but the people who are behind me are always ready to do what it is they have to do. They work together as a team. Their staff work together as a team. I feel very blessed to be able to lead them in here and to have them as friends and colleagues, as well as all of you.

As for the assembly staff, the Clerk, the folks at the table, people who routinely give me notices of dissatisfaction to fill out: You do amazing work. The people who keep us safe, the people who keep us fed, the people who keep this place clean, the people who make this—this is a very, very special place. I think we all know it.

I'm going to finish with a story that I tell every year, but I want to thank the pages first. You guys are great. It's so much fun having you here. You keep us grounded. You could never get away with what we get away with in here at school, so I hope we haven't set a bad example, especially today.

So there was a page about 10 years ago from Windsor–Tecumseh. Her name is Mira Gillis. She left here and she went to be a page in the Senate in Ottawa, and then she went to the London School of Economics. I'm not sure what she's doing right now. I've seen her a couple of times on a plane. When she came here, I asked the question that I've asked a lot of you: "What's the most interesting thing about this place, besides me?" It never works out. She said, "You know what, I came here and I was scared. I was really scared because this place is so big and far away, and you're all so important." Then she said, "And then I got here and I realized you're just like one big family." My jaw dropped because she's right. As I said—I'm going to say it again, folks—we are one big family, a dysfunctional family. We put the "fun" in "dysfunctional."

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I want to thank you very much. Merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, happy Kwanza.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize MPP Shreiner.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: On behalf of the small team in the corner here, I want to wish everyone happy Hanukkah, merry Christmas, happy new year and happy holidays.

One of the things that I love about this place is the relationships we're able to develop with each and every one of you across party lines. I know we all have our differences and our disagreements and our intense debates—I can be as intense as anyone—but at the end of the day, we're all here to serve the people of this province. It's an honour to do that work. I value the relationships we develop with each and every one of you. I hope you go home safe to your ridings and have an opportunity to spend time with family, friends, constituents and the people who are close to you during this break time.

Speaker, I want to congratulate you on finishing your first year as the first woman Speaker in Ontario history.

Applause.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I want to thank all the journalists for sticking around during scrums. You know, when you're last but not least, it's nice to know that you usually stick around for me.

I want to thank everyone at the table. You're kind of our de facto House leader over there, keeping us in line with what we do.

I want to thank each and all the staff who work here, especially the folks who clean the bathrooms every day because that is such important work, and those of you who keep us fed, keep the place running and make us look good for the public.

I also want to say to my team, who I know is up in the office watching: We may have the smallest team here, but because of your great work I think we punch well above our weight here in this corner of the House.

Happy holidays, everyone. We look forward to seeing you in the spring.

Applause.

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

Hon. Doug Ford: Thank you, Speaker. As a matter of fact, I'm going to start off with you, Speaker. You've done an incredible job, not just in being the first woman Speaker; I think we were all proud when we brought guests in. I've never seen the place look so good in my entire life. You cleaned it up, and—just get those lights on the outside of the building for us next year. But in saying that, Speaker, thank you so much.

I want to thank the Clerks and, of course, our pages. You're just wonderful young people. You're going to have such a bright future. You're going to be leading this province, no matter if it's in the private sector or the public sector. One of you, or maybe a few of you, may be standing right here, may be standing right at this desk. Unfortunately, Vic is still going to be here 30 years down the road, but it's all good.

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You know, the legislative staff and all our staff here—but let's not forget, all of us, the people that are sitting back in our ridings. Without the people in our ridings, we wouldn't even be here. When the phone call comes in, they're picking it up.

I love our team, just like each and every one of you. You are leaders. I never lose track that I would not be sitting here if it wasn't for each and every one of you.

Now, my favourite people in this building: my friends up in the media. Let's use Colin as an example. I've known him since 2010. As much as the tough questions come, you see his kids come in one day and you put that all aside because they have families as well. They need to earn that paycheque. They're no different than us. I just want to thank you for everything you do, as well.

Right here, in the Legislature—yes, we go back and forth. When the pages come into my office and we chat, I say, “Do you ever see, when we have a break, how the opposition—we're going over there, and we're talking back and forth?” Our great leader from Guelph, I'm coming up to pay you a visit, to visit a police station. This is how it works, even though we may disagree back and forth.

Then, the leader of the third party mentioned the young lady that said, “Boy, they're so powerful.” People come up to, I'm sure, each and every one of us: “You have so much power.” We have zero power. We have massive responsibility, and when we work together, we can do incredible things even though we disagree.

So I just want to thank everyone here. I want to wish everyone merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, happy holidays. Just think of this: There's no place in the world that can stand here and say, “We have 110 nationalities.” No matter if it's Hanukkah or Ramadan or whatever it is, we always respect everyone's religion, race, creed, colour. That's what makes Ontario the greatest place in the entire world.

I just want to say God bless each and every one of you. We're very grateful, each and every one of us, for sitting here. Have a very safe holiday.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Before we go, I would like to also say thank you to the incredible team of people that make this place hum every single day, make it beautiful, make it function; and to each and every one of you for making my first year as Speaker so memorable and so enjoyable.

I wish each and every one of you a healthy, happy and safe holiday season. Merry Christmas, and I look forward to seeing you in the new year.