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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 31 March 2021

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 31 mars 2021

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Let us pray.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2021 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 24, 2021, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Good morning. I just want to let the House know I have asthma and I have an allergic reaction to masks, so I have been coughing a little bit, but I am totally healthy. I never thought I would start off a finance and budget speech like that, and I think that that's a testament to where we are as a province.

I also just want to get it on the record because yesterday we saw 2,336 cases and, continuing with the theme of the variants and the race with vaccines, it is disturbing to see the trend of how the variants are affecting the population of this province. In the 60-plus age group, there were 383 cases; between the ages of 40 and 59, 664; between the ages of 20 and 39, 789 cases; and under 20, almost 500 cases. So this is a very different pandemic, and we would argue that it required a very different pandemic budget to respond to the changing circumstances that the province now finds itself in. We can debate about why we are here, we can debate about where money was not invested and we can debate about what actually worked, but the facts remain: We are now at six days solid of over 2,000 cases per day. I think we can all agree that we are trending in the wrong direction.

I try to start off in a positive manner, because people need to know that hope is on the horizon, and so I'm going to start off with a story from an essential worker who reached out to me just yesterday. Her name is Kerry Townson, and she gave me permission to share her story with the House this morning in the context of the vaccine investment that's needed in Ontario. It reads as follows:

"As an essential caregiver for my aunt in Brantford, I received my first dose of the vaccine on February 18, 2021. Brierwood retirement and long-term care booked both first and second doses at the same time.

"After checking with Brierwood before my scheduled dose, they assured me that the second dose would be available. I took time off work and drove to Brantford on March 25 only to be turned away. Brierwood was never

informed and was inundated with caregivers arriving who had been turned away at the hospital.

"The hospital was told that public health was to inform all caregivers. Unfortunately, this did not happen. I have forwarded you the email that I received two days after my scheduled appointment." How disorganized is this?

"Also, as an essential caregiver, why would second doses be rescheduled (my second dose is now June 17, 2021)? All residents and health care workers at Brierwood had their second doses about three to four weeks ago. What about the essential caregivers who are doing the same work as PSWs?"

She goes on to say, "I do not understand these flip-flopping directives from the province and am very dismayed about the lack of communication.

"If you have any follow-up information, I would appreciate it. If not, I appreciate your efforts on behalf of Waterloo residents." This was a Brantford resident who had reached out.

I have to say, we were encouraged that there is almost \$1 billion in the budget for the vaccine rollout. This is a good step that the government has taken. We need the vaccine rollout to be working.

Yesterday, I sat in my place in this House and I asked the Minister of Health—I actually asked the Premier, but the question was answered, or not answered, by the Minister of Health. I referenced that Waterloo region is not getting its fair share per capita, based on the provincial formula. We were supposed to have received 89,000 doses of the vaccine; we have only received 66,000. All we are asking of the government, and the health table I guess, is to ensure that the province follows their own rules and their own directives, Mr. Speaker. So I tried to put that on the radar of the Minister of Health yesterday. She in turn blamed the federal government.

On the vaccine rollout, there really cannot be this pointing fingers at the federal and the provincial. Everybody has to take ownership for their responsibility. The question that I asked the Minister of Health yesterday was very clear and very simple: You have the vaccines. They are in Ontario. They are in freezers. Who is making the decisions about who gets what and when, or how much and when?

Waterloo region should be classified as a priority community because of our diverse and marginalized populations. Myself and my counterpart the member for Kitchener Centre have raised this now for almost a full year, around collecting race-based data, tracking cases, really understanding how the virus was spreading during that first and that second wave.

As I started off my comments this morning, we are dealing now with a very different pandemic, so that approach and that strategy obviously have to change. Given what we have heard now from front-line doctors—I know the government is very selective about who they listen to, but certainly Dr. Warner yesterday made a very compelling point about ICUs.

Now, that's not to say that there aren't people in this Legislature who don't take science into account. There was a former PC member—he now sits over here on this side of the House; incredibly disruptive to the people of this province by sharing information that does not bode well for the successful rollout of the vaccine. It does not instill confidence.

I want to go back to this point of confidence in knowing that the government is doing everything it can. Today, I believe, is General Hillier's last day on the vaccine strategy committee. There are now two new deputy ministers who have been appointed to that. One would hope, Mr. Speaker, that those two individuals have experience with community public health. I hope that they do. I think the community public health piece has thus far been missing.

I also think, and I hope the government would agree, that the rollout with the 34 different public health units is not going equally. It is not being rolled out in the very same way, because those public health units have different capacities. But, on a positive note, the money that's in this budget for vaccines is a good first step.

0910

On Monday, I spoke to the actual budget bill, Bill 269, and the 10 schedules that are in the budget. I specifically focused on schedule 10, but it is worth noting that in the budget bill there are 10 schedules, which deal with credit unions, the Electricity Act, financial professionals, Invest Ontario, the Insurance Act, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, the Ontario Loan Act and then the Taxation Act.

In the Taxation Act, it is worth noting that the government has included as their strategy to get more women into the workforce—because we all know at this point in time that women have borne the brunt of this pandemic. The research and the evidence is very clear. The government had this in hand prior to crafting this budget, and yet, what did women in Ontario get from this government? They got a task force. I'm going to say that I would put the task force aside, because we actually already have many of the answers, and I would just direct you to the YWCA Ontario brief, *An Equitable, Gender-Responsive Budget*.

Instead of offering a tax credit top-up of \$250 for a child care space that doesn't exist—it's not going to be helpful to women who are trying to re-enter the workforce or to women who are trying to retrain, because the data shows us that over 200,000 people in this province have been out of work for over 27 weeks. This is significant because it creates what economists call a scarring effect, where there is reticence and reluctance and real barriers to re-entering the workforce.

But what does the budget do? The budget promises an Ontario retraining tax credit, but it's tied to a federal tax credit for retraining. I would argue, and folks have told us this, that by tying it to a federal tax credit training program, you're actually putting up another barrier. Why should women have to go through the federal tax training credit in order to qualify for the provincial? Why not take ownership and take a step back and say, "Listen, we don't want to set up any more barriers for women to re-enter the workforce"? Why have them go through another administrative hoop to qualify for something that the province is going to try to offer? Why not actually simplify and streamline it, and not intentionally put up another barrier for women? This makes no sense to us. As the finance critic and I know from the labour critic and from the health critic, we are hearing from women across the province, and they're saying, "Why are you doing this?" To date, we have received no answers.

The YWCA Ontario, in their briefing document, which I know the government had in hand prior to crafting this budget—I don't know how you responded to it, because you had a budget consultation process which was behind closed doors. I have argued this on many occasions over the years that if you do not have an open and transparent process, you create legislation which will not meet the needs of the people of this province.

Normally—members will know—the NDP, the Liberals, the Green member and the PC members travel around the province and we all hear the same thing, which is helpful, because if you are trying to respond to a problem, it's actually very good to have everyone on the same page, or at least having heard the same argument. The government, for the first time in almost 30 years, I believe, chose not to do this. Given our technology and given the fact that we did four months of consultation at SCOFEA last June, July, August and September, the capacity for the government to actually do this was well in hand. I mean, we know how to consult. We know how to use technology to ensure that it can be an inclusive process. Once again, the government intentionally chose not to go down that route.

The YWCA brief, though, has some very strong recommendations. They say, "To support an equitable, gender-responsive 2021 budget, the YWCA Ontario Coalition recommends the province:

"(1) Mandate 10 paid sick days immediately." A made-in-Ontario sick day program: I'm going to touch on that in a little bit.

"(2) Institute a \$4 per hour pandemic pay premium for child care, for shelter and other front-line workers during the pandemic." These are predominantly female-dominated professions.

"(3) Invest in the child care sector including increasing base funding and additional investments to prevent non-profit child care closures." Some 66 child care centres in the province have closed. We were already at such a delicate place with child care. If you're a parent in the province of Ontario, you have a chance of one in eight of getting a quality child care space that you can afford. This is not the way that you create economic opportunities.

As I've said on many occasions pre-pandemic, for every dollar invested in early learning and care, there's a \$7 return on that investment. I would argue that now, in the pandemic, when you're responding to a market force where women have been excluded from that market, this actually would be more than a \$7 return on investment. We're not going to get the economy up and running again to address the she-covery and the she-cession if women aren't part of the solution and if women aren't part of the budget, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing that they have recommended is: "(5) Support women's labour market participation by taking a multi-year funding approach for pre-apprentice training programs, creating a specific category for women in Employment Ontario, and targeting women in a concerted manner with a new \$115-million skills training fund.

"(6) Prioritize housing investments to meet Ontario's affordable and supportive housing needs and offer rent relief provisions." I think that this pandemic has taught us some very important lessons on housing. Where we work, where we live and how, obviously, in Ontario when you have a growing number of people who have insecure housing—when they're couch-surfing, that's qualified as having housing; this runs counter to all health and safety protocols.

They also say, "(7) Invest in girls' programming. Currently, there is no provincial funding for girls' programming at all." Mr. Speaker, do you know what makes strong women? Strong girls. And there's certainly a growing body of evidence that demonstrates that girls are left out of many budgets at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

"(8) Stabilize enhanced funding for VAW shelters and create a province-wide strategy on gender-based violence." We heard a lot about this in the budget, Mr. Speaker. To date, though, this government's record on ensuring that women are safe and that the institutions and the agencies that keep women safe—more and more turn to fundraising. I hope that we can agree that people shouldn't have to fundraise to keep women safe in the province of Ontario. The pandemic has obviously highlighted—the finance minister referenced this in his comments—that there are increased rates of violence. The response from the government to these agencies has been disappointing, Mr. Speaker.

Finally, their recommendation is: "(9) Help non-profits at risk of closure through a sector stabilization fund and through greater access to existing funding." I had a conversation with the Minister of Finance prior to the budget being printed, and I made the point that the not-for-profit sector in Ontario is underutilized. This is a government that wants to accelerate housing, community programming, health and safety initiatives, and child care. The not-for-profit sector is ready, willing and able to respond to that need and to accelerate it, and I do want to point out, as I did to the Minister of Finance, they're also not big on red tape. They don't have time for red tape. They are lean, they are streamlined and they're ready to get to work. Investing in the not-for-profit sector was a

missed opportunity in this budget. There has to be greater transparency when that funding actually gets out into the community, because it can't be the government picking winners and losers, as we saw with this budget.

So I would highly recommend that the government just go to the YWCA. Meet with Sheila Block, meet with the Council of Canadians—what's it called, Peggy? The Canadian council? They actually have a report that's ready to go, so don't take a step backwards and study what barriers exist for women across the province for a year. Let's get it done now. Quite honestly—hopefully, we'll get the chance—we'll try to amend this budget to put that gender lens on this budget. Oh sorry, it was the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. They actually came out, ahead of the budget, and pointed out how women's economic security is so fragile.

0920

While many women are working on the front lines of COVID-19 in the caring and service sectors, women also represent the majority of workers in the sectors hardest-hit by the economic shutdown in the first and second waves. In total, 2.8 million lost their jobs or were working less than half of their regular hours as a result of the March 2020 lockdown. These are serious numbers, and so not addressing it and not investing in reducing those barriers in a very strategic way means that you're intentionally saying, "You know what? We can't deal with this right now."

Now, I will acknowledge that these times in the province of Ontario are incredibly challenging and unprecedented. But when you have voices who have the knowledge, the application of that knowledge really is the responsibility of the government.

They also make the point around unpaid caring demands impacting women's paid work. Young women are particularly hit. Women aged 15 to 24 experienced the greatest initial COVID-related employment losses in March. So you'll have a whole younger generation, likely graduating from post-secondary if they're fortunate to afford it—they have debt, and they have no jobs.

Many mothers exited the workforce because—I took many of these calls and I know my colleagues did as well. By working at home full-time, also caring for children and sometimes caring for parents, and then also assisting with the schooling and the education online piece—there was a tipping point. I can't tell you how many conversations I had with women. All they wanted was a strategy to deal with early learning and care so that that could take one thing off their plate. Structurally, this budget does not accommodate for the investment that is needed in the capital investment in child care. Remember, that investment is worth it.

The full impact of COVID-19 on women's work has been unequal. Fully half of all low-wage workers earning \$14 an hour or less were laid off or lost the majority of their hours between February and April. This included 58% of low-wage women and 45% of men in this earnings bracket. For those in the top earnings group with wages of more than \$48 an hour, only 1% lost their employment or

a majority of hours. By the end of the summer, they had been fully recovered. So what does this tell us? It tells us that the pandemic has affected both women and men very differently, but also those essential workers.

I talk about the K modelling of the economy. There are some people who have done very well in this pandemic. Just ask the CEO of Walmart—he's doing okay—and of Costco. The small businesses on main street who put their hopes and dreams and investments and sometimes a second mortgage into their business, they're not doing so well.

The workers who work at Amazon, where there was an outbreak of 600 COVID-19 cases, and health and safety—

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Over the course of the entire year.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Over the entire year, fine, but that's still not very good, right? The Solicitor General is making a point that it was over a whole year. It's still a big number. It's still a big number that actually impacts the entire community.

The inequities exposed by COVID-19 are very real, particularly for racialized and immigrant women who were disproportionately impacted. Job losses and reductions in working hours were particularly high among recent immigrants to Canada and those who have immigrated to Canada within the last 10 years, a large majority of whom are racialized and working in precarious jobs that carry a high risk of exposure to COVID-19. Over one third of recent immigrants who were employed in February 2020 had lost their jobs or the majority of their working hours by the end of April 2020, eight percentage points above the losses posted by Canadian-born workers.

I raise the issue of racism in the province of Ontario. My colleague from Kitchener Centre and our Black caucus have tried to put this equity lens on everything that we see from the government. In fact, it's now embedded in our briefing notes when we review and research policies from the government: How is this affecting the most marginalized people in the province of Ontario? I would argue, and would love to be proven wrong, that this is not the lens that the government looked at when they developed this budget.

This is a budget that, from our perspective, is steeped in privilege. If you are designing a budget and you've never had to figure out how to pay your rent, how to feed your children, how to pay your electricity bill, or you somehow think that waiting for two weeks for an insufficient federal program for paid sick days is somehow going to meet the needs of you and your family or give you a choice to not go to work sick, then that is steeped in privilege. What we have learned from this pandemic is that that is an inappropriate, inefficient and, some would argue, unethical approach to dealing with the pandemic that the province of Ontario is currently experiencing.

So women need ongoing support. In January 2021, there were 2.2 million unemployed workers receiving EI benefits. There is a lot of debate right now, and the discourse is ongoing, around what happens when the federal government removes those wage enhancements. How far will that send the province into an operational recession?

That is why being proactive right now is so important. Give women at least a fighting chance to re-enter the workforce, to have some support along the way. We will not recover without women meeting their potential in this province, and this province will not meet its potential if women don't meet their potential. These are points that were well-documented, Mr. Speaker. The data and the solutions are right there in front of you.

"Investments in care are hit and miss"—this is a continuation of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and this was written by Katherine Scott. "With the onset of the pandemic, the holes in Canada's care economy and related social infrastructure have compounded the health care and economic crisis."

This is a government that says—finally, you understand that the health and well-being of Ontarians is directly connected to the health and the well-being of the economy, but for the first wave and second wave, you didn't address that strategically to keep people safe.

What we know, and what we know very well, Mr. Speaker, is that the sick days piece, which my colleague from London West has brought to the floor of this House, is so well-documented, and the government's obstinacy—it's more than just reluctance; it's just pure obstinacy. They've dug in in a stubborn, stubborn way, when we know that almost 60% of the employees in this province don't have access to paid sick days, especially if they are low-wage or racialized.

You have this data, you have this information, and you actually even have the evidence to show that because workers didn't have access to paid sick days in Ontario—in fact, this government removed the two measly days that the former Liberal government brought into play. But in a hot spot like Peel, 66% of the confirmed community outbreaks from September to December 2020 occurred in workplaces. You had this data right up until December. We are at the end of March; the budget was released last week. You intentionally left out a made-in-Ontario paid sick day strategy, knowing that we are right now in the middle of a third wave.

I am looking to some of the members from Peel because a Peel Public Health study found that 25% of the workers with COVID-19 symptoms still reported to work, including workers who had tested positive for COVID-19. Of close to 8,000 workers who had COVID-19 symptoms between August and January 2021, about 2,000 reported to their jobs. Two thousand workers went to work with COVID-19 in the Peel region because they had no choice.

There isn't access in the province of Ontario to a streamlined, easy-to-access paid sick day. There were; they had at least two days. Two days would have allowed some to stay home and get tested. Surely we can agree that that would have been a good thing.

0930

For those of you who say the federal program is sufficient, is good enough, I'm here to tell you that it is not good enough. I want to get it on the record because I'm tired, as are the people of this province, of listening to "how great" and how the province of Ontario doesn't have

to do their job because the federal government has done their job.

The Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit was an important initiative. Our leader at the federal level, Jagmeet Singh, was instrumental. Because it's a minority government, they were able to negotiate some levels that were way better than what the Trudeau Liberals had proposed.

But this is what is wrong with it. These are the shortcomings:

It is a temporary program that ends in September 2021; you know that.

It can only be used for COVID-19-related absences.

Workers must be aware that the benefit is available and know how to apply. You brag about the fact that it's undersubscribed and that there's still \$700 million in there. The reason it's undersubscribed and there's still money in that paid sick day bank is because people aren't accessing it.

Workers are only eligible if they have lost 50% of their regular weekly hours. This means that time off to get a COVID test would likely not be covered. We want people to get tested, we want to do contact tracing and we want to make sure that once you get a test result, you don't have to go to work.

Weeks are calendar weeks, which means if you work Monday to Friday, and you're sick on Thursday, there is no way you can get the benefit for the last two days. Does that sound like a program that's going to work?

Workers are eligible to receive the benefit for up to two one-week periods, not 10 days taken as needed. Now, the federal government has a proposal to expand this to four one-week periods.

Workers have to wait one week or more to apply. Direct deposit processing sometimes can happen, but sometimes it takes five days.

Workers must have earned at least \$5,000 in prior years—which actually addresses the insecure contract workers who don't qualify for this \$5,000, or you can't prove that they've made the \$5,000.

That's why this program is undersubscribed. We are going to continue to have people go to work sick in Ontario, and COVID-19 and now the variants will continue to spread.

So when you consider what a missed opportunity it was—I thought for sure you were going to have something in here on sick days. I really did. It would have squeezed us, which you're very adept at doing sometimes. You would have demonstrated, though, that you've actually listened to the evidence, you've paid attention to the research and that you seriously understand how this virus is spreading across the province. Because you didn't put that in, it really speaks to how disingenuous this call for a healthy population is. The lowest paid worker in the province of Ontario is just as important as the highest, and their health and their well-being impacts the highest-paid workers.

You have demonstrated as a government that you're very attuned to those highest-paid workers and to those CEOs. Those CEOs, including the job creators in this

province, have called for, at the very least, an emergency Ontario paid sick day. They want that leadership from this government because they understand out there—outside of this Pink Palace, they understand that the well-being of all of those workers is now impacting the economy.

We heard yesterday that the Premier is now contemplating a potential third shutdown, which is exactly what you promised would not happen. You promised that this budget and the investments to date would prevent that. Well, that has proven to be not true.

Community Living—God love them. This is an agency that does such important work caring for vulnerable people. It's a multi-service developmental services agency supporting children and adults with intellectual disabilities. I mean, these are the best people in the world, really, and they're in all of our communities. They have struggled. They have struggled to maintain the health and well-being of the folks that they care for. One of the most important actions the government could have taken was to implement a permanent wage enhancement. That would have demonstrated that you actually understand the challenges that agencies like Community Living have gone through. They say, "In this spirit, we ask that some of these funds be designated to pilot implementation of the made-in-Ontario individualized funding framework developed by CLTO."

People come to the table. They've said, "You know what? It's not working as it's currently funded." All of us know this from across the province.

And then of course there's the housing issue, which I touched on. The Co-operative Housing Federation Canada makes a very good point by saying, "Affordable housing is a long-term public asset that drives productivity and economic growth, promotes economic mobility, and provides greater household stability."

This is exactly what we want from the province. This is the kind of leadership that we want and we need after a full year of being in a constant state of crisis. If you get housing right, I argue and have argued for many years, a lot of other things fall into place. I've raised this in the House before. The not-for-profit sector, including the House of Friendship, the Working Centre and the downtown community health centre, partnered to create stable housing for those who face insecure housing on a regular basis. They took over a local hotel. They brought in the health sector to support physical health and well-being, and also mental health and addictions. They created their own community hub.

This is the thing that the Liberals always used to talk about—"We want community hubs"—but they never financed them. If you want to instill a sense of collaboration and community spirit, then you don't have these agencies competing against each other. You give them dedicated funding and you let them do their job. Certainly that's what the House of Friendship did in Kitchener. It is a model that the province should look at because it makes so much sense and it actually saves money down the line.

There was a lot of talk yesterday, in particular, about mental health. I have to say that that will be our next crisis

that this province faces. We need to be ready to address a heightened—an accelerated—sense of urgency on the mental health file. I'm particularly aware of what's happening in our schools, because my husband and my sister are both teachers. One teaches in Peel and one is in Waterloo. When parents are reaching out to teachers and sharing stories about their concerns and about their worries about their children and how they will move forward, and about the loss of a sense of resiliency—because social isolation is obviously a real challenge—you know that there is a desperate need for any kind of support, any kind of advice.

AEFO, CUPE, ETFO, OECTA and OSSTF/FEESO call on the Ford government, and they have been the entire time, to lower the class sizes to keep students safe, because keeping schools open is so important, and to address learning loss incurred during the pandemic—which is why we will not be able to support the \$1.8-billion reduction to the education file that went out by the ministry memo.

Even if we all get vaccinated and we start school in September—and God, we hope that that happens—the learning disruption and the mental health piece are not going away because the pandemic has dissipated. In fact, all of those concerns, all of those issues are going to land in that classroom, where, I have said consistently, all of the social issues always land. And if they don't land in that classroom, then they end up in the back of a police car.

These education leaders have called for that lower class size piece to make that transition more humane, more compassionate. They've called for enhanced safety measures to ensure infection control.

The deficit in our schools in Ontario is a hangover from the Liberals. The infrastructure needs of our school system, in our 7,000 schools across this province, are very real. But what an opportunity that you had before you to invest in upgrading HVAC systems to keep infection down, to keep our schools safe, to keep our schools open and to create jobs—the HVAC folks, various advocacy groups, came to us in the finance committee back in June. They made a compelling case for the return on investment for upgrading our school infrastructure. Why you did not take this up from a—think of the jobs that would have been created locally in all of our ridings, in all of our schools.

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Finally, they've called for mental health supports for students and education workers and supports for students with special education needs.

I know the government thinks very highly of this child benefit that you have touted as parental choice—the \$400 per student, the \$500 for special needs. The Minister of Education says that parents can use that to take their kid to camp. That does not help the special education students who need a coordinated, cohesive response in our school system. The \$1.8 billion that's going to be coming out of education also coincides with the price tag of this child benefit: \$1.8 billion. Parents need support, but it should not come at the expense and the cost of the education system and the investment that is needed to ensure that all children in our public education system have the opportunities to meet their potential.

These education leaders have a campaign called Everything Is Not OK.

“Everything Is Not OK: Sector Leaders Call for Mental Health and Addiction Wait Times Strategy to be in Upcoming Ontario Budget.

“Province's mental health leaders are calling on government to ensure that a mental health and addiction plan is part of the government's COVID-19 recovery plan.”

The investment that was announced in this budget is insufficient, as a starter.

“More than 6,000 people have already signed an online petition calling on long-term, targeted and sustainable investments in Ontario's mental health and addiction system”—it's not enough to say in this House there's no health without mental health if you don't fund it, if you don't invest in it.

They call for:

“Consistent care. Because regardless of whether you're in northern Ontario, rural Ontario or downtown Toronto, all Ontarians should get the same high-quality care.” This is not happening right now.

“Faster care.” People are waiting too long. When you're in crisis, you shouldn't have to wait.

“Easier access to care. Because it's too complicated and Ontarians don't know where to turn to for mental health or addiction services.

“Transparent care. Because Ontarians don't know how long they are going to wait and what they can expect from their care.”

I'll just leave you with a quote from my friend Camille Quenneville: “COVID-19 has had and will continue to have life-long impacts on many Ontarians. Today, thousands are struggling with severe grief and loss as a result of the pandemic. Many of these individuals are essential workers and health care workers who worked throughout the pandemic to keep us all safe and healthy. We need to ensure that support is there for them when they need it.”

You will get your opportunity later on this afternoon when my colleague from Hamilton Mountain brings forward her private member's bill, which ensures mental health supports for essential workers and that they're not denied that resource. So you may have missed the mark on this budget, but you're going to get a chance later on today to support that private member's bill.

The transformation in mental health has been an ongoing issue in this province for many, many years. You had full licence in this budget—we would never have challenged a significant and transformative investment in mental health, because we understand, on this side of the House, and I know some of you do as well, that everything is not okay on the mental health front. Why you would not take that opportunity to invest is quite something.

One of the biggest challenges that we are facing right now, globally, in this country and in this province, is climate change.

The environmental alliance says this about your budget: “We are disappointed with this budget. We were hopeful that the Ontario government would take this opportunity to revisit and reset its hostile approach to the environment. Sadly, that's not the case.

“The near-term focus on COVID-19 and the additional assistance for families, citizens, and small businesses” was needed. “However, governments around the world are making plans for a green recovery from COVID-19 and putting climate change at the centre of their efforts to create jobs.”

I would urge you to look at our Green New Democratic Deal. We have done a full two years’ worth of research to determine where those green jobs are, how we can get the economy going, and that it’s an inclusive economy, that we don’t leave people behind. Because social justice is also very key to environmental leadership, and knowing that climate change disproportionately affects the poorest and most marginalized people means that it requires a differential response, not the way that you’ve done business all along. So, jobs: If you are really focused on the economy, then investing in a green economy would be forward-thinking. It would be progressive. It would actually signal to the people of this province that you can be coping or trying to handle this COVID-19 pandemic, but also that you haven’t forgotten about the other issues important to Ontarians.

They go on to say, “Ontario’s budget barely references climate change. And it doesn’t provide any funding for even the few climate change programs the government has already committed to.” So you’re not even funding your own plan. “Where is the \$400 million promised for the emissions reduction fund, for example?”

“The section on protecting Ontario’s environment is full of contradictions,” they write. “For example, the government touts Ontario’s clean electricity supply, though the budget omits that the electricity sector is projected to see a 300% rise in emissions by 2030 due to an increased reliance on natural gas. Likewise, that section asserts that relatively minor spending on data-gathering will see that ‘flood risk is reduced’—you don’t reduce flooding in the province of Ontario just by gathering data. In fact, you undermined our ability to manage flooding by undermining conservation authorities in Ontario, so—I was going to say something, but it was fairly unparliamentary, and I edited myself, Mr. Speaker—“... will see that ‘flood risk is reduced,’ even though the government recently undermined the ability of conservation authorities to stop dangerous development in flood plains and hazard areas.

“We are glad”—and so were we—that there was no specific message around Highway 413. I do want to say Highway 413 is not needed. It is not an economic driver. It will negatively impact the well-being of so many communities around that corridor and, at a cost of \$8 billion, it is not where you should be investing right now. Sustainable investment is where you should be investing.

But they do point out, “Unfortunately, the Bradford Bypass, otherwise known as the Holland Marsh expressway, is mentioned in the budget. This highway would bulldoze through the greenbelt and the Holland Marsh, one of the most productive agricultural specialty crop areas in the country and one of the largest wetlands in the region, causing severe stormwater and groundwater impacts”—not a good idea.

Because you still are contemplating, in the year 2021, these kinds of infrastructure projects, knowing full well the impact that climate change has on our health, our well-being and our economy, it signals to us that you had very selective hearing when you were doing those budget consultations. But of course, as I’ve pointed out, we don’t know what was said to you because we were excluded. I will say this as a point of record: When you exclude the official opposition, you are not only disrespecting us as fellow parliamentarians, but you are disrespecting the people that we serve. That undermines our democracy, and then you end up with a budget that doesn’t reflect what the people of this province need, the people that we serve. It’s very problematic.

Just to continue on with climate change—and I only have a few more minutes left. If you can demonstrate to the people that the changes they want to see are actually happening—and, to date, you have not done that on the environmental file at all. You lost a significant court case in the Supreme Court last week around the carbon tax. You spent \$30 million on that. The Premier was quoted as saying that he would do it again. This does not instill confidence that rational thinking or that evidence-based thinking or even critical thinking is at the heart of the decision-making of this government.

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This is a quote from David Miller, who was the former mayor of Toronto and was, I would argue, ahead of his time on environmental policies. He says, “If you can demonstrate to people that the changes they want to see are actually happening, you give people more confidence in the process, and then it becomes self-reinforcing—more public confidence leads to more public support for change, which allows for more changes to be enacted. Momentum builds as people start doing things in their own lives, encouraged by the knowledge that their government is there with them.”

The people of this province do not think that you are with them on climate change or on any kind of environmental reform or modernization of infrastructure investment. They do not trust you.

I have said this before: The only other time that I’ve seen it in this House where the population, the citizens that we serve, recognized that the government no longer had their trust—because they have abused that trust—then that had electoral consequences, because that whole side of the House used to be Liberals, and then they got down to seven members. That was the people of this province saying that selling off Hydro One and not ensuring that our educational and health care needs are being met have consequences. This should serve as a lesson to all government members on that side, that this budget does not reflect what the people need. In doing so, you have demonstrated where your priorities are, which are not the same as the people of this province.

Finally, I just want to say on the sustainability piece that I know that there was an announcement yesterday around sustainable investment for engineering. It was an investment made by the Minister of Labour and the Minister of

Finance to try to get 100 engineers to develop some sustainable infrastructure. I want to say to the government that if you come to the University of Waterloo, this is an ongoing conversation that has been happening now for 25 years. That expertise and that knowledge exist on our own university campuses.

Why is the government so reticent to make use of that, to commercialize the research from a health sciences perspective, to procure the very products that are made here in Ontario, like the personal protective equipment from a company like Eclipse Automation in Cambridge or Canadian Shield in Waterloo? What a missed opportunity to demonstrate that you actually believe in Canadian and Ontarian innovators. I hope to change that with a bill that I'm going to be bringing forward on procurement and diversifying the procurement supply chain.

It should be a matter of course that the rhetoric that we heard from the Premier about how great Ontario companies are, but now those Ontario companies can't get their PPE or their health innovation into the very—they can't procure government contracts. Women, especially, can't get in the room to even bid on those contracts. If you want to generate the economy, then actually put the very good businesses that you talk about to work for the province of Ontario.

Just a final word on sustainability that Mr. Miller also supports is that there is a triple bottom line around sustainability: environmental, economic and social. If you leave people behind, which this budget does do, quite intentionally, then you lose confidence. The people of this province obviously lose confidence, but so do the very innovators that we want to actually inspire to invest in this province.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce also referenced this in their brief to the federal government, that in times of disruption, which we can all agree we are currently in, this is the time to be bold. You have licence. You have agency to be bold and to colour outside of those PC conservative lines, and you would have had our support in doing so. But to date, the inconsistency in the application of innovation in Ontario has been a fairly consistent theme.

When I met with primary care doctors across the province, including the area of Peterborough, the primary care doctors in this province said to myself and to our health critic, who was in the meeting, "Why do we have to work so hard to try to help the province get needles in arms?" That has been their major complaint. They are qualified. They have the trust of their patients. They're in our communities. They want to be part of the solution.

To date, the government has been very focused on the commercialization of those vaccinations—running commercials for Shoppers Drug Mart, for instance. How does this fit into a public health directive whereby you are excluding the people who have the skills and the talent and have taken an oath to secure the health and well-being of their patients?

Yesterday, also around the vaccination piece—I just want to say how hopeful people are about vaccines. My

brother-in-law finally got his vaccine and he said he wasn't prepared to have this feeling of relief. But that's what's at stake here. People need to have hope, and so the vaccine rollout must go better than it is currently going.

I was reading in Queen's Park Briefing that there's a private app company now staffing vaccine sites in Peel and in Sudbury. Check this out: The company is called BookJane. It's a software firm that describes itself as a "gig economy" platform for the health care sector, and it's staffing immunization clinics with doctors. It has mobilized more than 300 doctors through its app, which requires them to be part of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, of course. And then the doctors are paid \$170 per hour, or \$220 an hour on evenings and weekends, to administer vaccines at sites run by hospitals and public health units.

Now, this could go back to the e-health debacle, but the fact that our own public health units are relying on an app from a private company to find doctors in Ontario is quite something. I am running out of time, but I wanted to get this on the record. Why are we relying on a tech app to recruit doctors when the doctors have been knocking at your door, trying to get the vaccines, trying to be part of the solution? It really does leave us with many more questions than answers.

Our critic for disabilities has raised the issue around those who are vulnerable in the province of Ontario, who are on ODSP or Ontario Works or some form of social assistance whereby they are experiencing great challenges in accessing the vaccine. I raise this because those who struggle with disabilities, who are differently abled, shouldn't have to have additional barriers to access the vaccine, because they are vulnerable physically and also are probably exhausted by this COVID-19 experience, especially given the rates of support that they get in Ontario.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: What did you say?

Miss Monique Taylor: Zippo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes.

Finally, I just want to summarize. By now you should understand that we, of course, will not be supporting this budget. That shouldn't surprise you, given the feedback that we tried to give and the missed opportunities that are currently in this budget.

I feel like this province is at a very frightening tipping point. Yesterday, one of the doctors said that the state of denial must end. If we have sick workers that are continuing to go to work sick, we will never get this pandemic under control. We will never address the transmission rates that are currently happening right now in the province of Ontario.

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There will be a day of reckoning, especially in long-term care because that iron ring that this government talked about is not in the budget. The paid sick days: not in the budget. Paid vaccination time off: How can people go get vaccinated if they can't get the time off work, even for a couple of hours, even a measly couple of hours? Just

show a little faith in the people of this province. Give them the opportunity to safely get vaccinated and not have to pay the price for doing so. There is no permanent wage increase for personal support workers. SEIU has articulated the lack of respect that this government has demonstrated for PSWs. Hospital funding that doesn't cover what the Ontario Hospital Association have called for—Anthony Dale put out a call yesterday saying that this is not sustainable.

On tax deferrals for businesses: I was the economic development critic for a good long time. The fact that you didn't change the criteria for businesses to access the small business grant, what a missed opportunity to really thank the businesses in the province for their leadership and for their dedication during these challenging times.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will end my comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, it's always an honour to rise in this place and speak on behalf of my constituents in Milton in support of our budget, especially this time around, protecting people's health and our economy. I think it's important to highlight those two priorities: protecting people's health and our economy. It is with the investments of \$51 billion included in this budget that we'll work towards doing just that: protecting the health and well-being of every single Ontarian and creating the conditions that will see the economy come roaring back.

Let me highlight some of what this means to my constituents in the great riding of Milton, Mr. Speaker. March 2020 was the beginning of our uncharted journey that has brought us to now. Many businesses in my community of Milton were declared essential and remain essential for the supply chain, for the food chain and to support families right across this great province. One of those businesses is Sargent Farms. Since 1943, this family owned and operated business has not only employed hundreds of Miltonians but has produced chicken from farm to plate for millions right across this province. They are now in their third generation of operating this Milton institution and have no plans to slow down.

Sargent Farms is the largest provincially regulated chicken producer in Ontario. Being provincially regulated means that provincial food inspectors are integrated right into their facility and their day-to-day operations. With the onset of COVID-19, their business began to experience staff shortages on the production line and also staff shortages on the food inspector side of things. Sargent Farms would never compromise food safety. That's why they worked with my office and with the Ministry of Labour to ensure that more inspectors were hired and that staff and inspectors would be tested regularly. In this budget, we're building on this and providing more support for small businesses like Sargent Farms.

Over this past year, everyone in the province has realized how important reliable Internet is in order to work, learn and safely connect with family and friends online. Families and businesses in rural Milton have known this for years and have been fighting to get online.

This budget builds on the progress we have made with programs like CENGN and Mage Networks. Those programs have delivered real results for my constituents in the rural part of Milton. Because of the investment of \$63.3 million in the CENGN and Mage Networks broadband program, phase 1, we will see families getting online as soon as early next month, so just a week or two out now. They've been fighting for years for reliable Internet, and it's finally happening. This government is making it happen.

Our government has brought forward with this budget the most ambitious investment into cellular and broadband in our history, and that's \$4 billion. That is how serious we are about getting Ontarians online.

Students, families, small businesses and farmers in my riding of Milton are applauding this budget.

Our government's Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan is a \$4-billion investment that will allow kids to learn at home and small businesses to get connected. Families can now FaceTime or go on Zoom with friends and families without having to keep asking, "Are you frozen, or is it just me?"

This past year has shown us that although we may have been physically distant from our extended family, it has brought us closer than ever to those that we live with. That's why we will continue to support families each and every day.

From the beginning of this pandemic, our government has brought in supports for families, starting with a one-time payment of \$200 for each child and \$250 for children with special needs. I'm proud that we are building on that program with an additional payment, a third payment for twice as much: \$400 for each child and \$500 for children with disabilities. Speaker, that is a total of \$800 for each child and \$1,000 for children with disabilities since the beginning of the pandemic.

I've heard from a family of five in my riding—very similar to my own. Two of my kids are older and the youngest is still in high school. This family of five used these much-needed funds to buy computer desks, webcams and other supplies necessary for their school-aged kids.

Parents know best. They know what is best for their children and what they need in order to be successful. That's why we're putting this money into their hands. Obviously, as parents, we feel that they do know best.

I've heard from parents in my riding who have been able to purchase laptops and webcams in order to support their son's or daughter's transition to learning from home. I've heard from others who have been able to subsidize the increased usage of the Internet needed to learn and work from home.

Whether it is getting online or supporting your family, this budget continues to build on what we have been able to do in three short years of being in government. Milton, as everyone knows, is one of the fastest-growing towns in the province, and I heard from parents loud and clear during the last campaign that our schools were overflowing. The previous Liberal government ignored Milton

for far too long. I have been fighting for our community at Queen's Park each and every day and have been able to announce a whopping six new schools since taking office in June 2018. These schools include:

—Halton District School Board SW #1 secondary school, an investment worth \$42.5 million;

—Halton District School Board SW #11 elementary school, an investment worth \$21.4 million;

—Halton District School Board, #12 elementary school, an investment worth \$19.1 million;

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—Halton Catholic District School Board, #3 secondary school, an investment worth \$41.3 million;

—Halton Catholic District School Board, #10 elementary school, again, an investment worth \$17.2 million;

—CS Viamonde, a French elementary school, an investment worth \$9 million;

for a total investment into Milton of over \$150 million. That's since June 2018. These schools, as we all know, are extremely important and vital for creating opportunities for our kids.

But Speaker, there's more. Our government also invested nearly \$20 million in expanding one of our local secondary schools, Bishop Reding, that had over 60 portables outside to accommodate the growth in our community. It seems like there were more and more portables added every month.

I am proud that our government, with this budget, continues to invest in Milton and in communities right across our great province. That includes the back-to-school fund worth \$913 million; the Safe Return to Class Fund worth \$381 million; and Grants for Student Needs, \$21.5 billion, and that's an increase of \$736 million; altogether, an investment worth \$26.794 billion—with a "B," Mr. Speaker—more money into education than any other government in the history of our province. Our government, with this budget, is investing more money into our education system at a record level. Facts are important, and I'm very proud of these facts.

Our teachers and support staff have done an amazing job, especially over this past year, providing lessons in class and online. I know it hasn't been easy, but I have seen our educators approach this past year with an eagerness and an innovative attitude. Whether it is creating new ways for our students to connect virtually, or creating virtual or drive-through graduation ceremonies, we have seen new ways of doing things this past year.

One thing my office is proud to do each year, Mr. Speaker, is provide our graduating students with congratulatory certificates. We have prepared thousands of these certificates over the past three years, and I am proud to have this work well under way this coming year again.

That, of course, includes birthday greetings for our seniors, for each and every person living in a long-term-care or retirement home in my riding of Milton. It's a little token that I can provide that might bring a smile, a bit of a surprise, on their birthdays.

Nothing is more important than supporting our seniors, and we on this side of the House have invested like never

before in supporting our seniors. Over \$2 billion in the long-term care protection fund continues to provide the necessary resources for our long-term-care homes to be safe, to ensure that our seniors are protected and can live with dignity. We have invested \$405 million to help with relieving operating pressures in the long-term-care sector. Our front-line nurses and support staff have been working hours and hours of overtime, and we cannot thank them enough for the commitment they have to supporting our seniors. We continue to invest in people through our \$1.9 billion to increase staff levels—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I apologize for having to interrupt the member from Milton, but unfortunately the time for debate this morning has expired.

Debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Jamie West: Speaker, 38% of Canada's opioid overdose deaths happened in Ontario last year. That's the highest number of opioid overdose deaths of any province or territory in the country—the highest by a long shot. But those aren't statistics. Those are people. Those are families whose lives were shattered. Those are sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles. Those are best friends and work friends. Those are our neighbours. Those are people who are desperate for help.

While the Conservative government continues to talk a good game, it's all sizzle and no steak. Every year, the federal government provides Ontario with \$175 million for mental health and addictions. Do you know how much the Conservatives put towards this in their 2019 budget? Zero—zero in 2019, zero in 2020, and zero in this budget too.

Sheldon O'Brien sent me this letter about his brother:

"Dennis O'Brien Jr. That's my brother's name. He died last month on Jan. 13. He died alone. He did not have the proper resources to seek help for his mental health and addictions problems.

"That's the fault of improper funding to mental health and addictions programs.

"It's time to start taking action. We get it, you're 'working' on it. We have heard that for months, if not years.

"Our homeless populations and vulnerable populations cannot afford to keep waiting.

"The safe consumption site cannot come soon enough.

"I work downtown as a security guard and we usually see one overdose per shift where we need to administer Narcan.

"In Police Foundations, I learned about how bad our downtown core had gotten in terms of the vulnerable population, but it's much worse than anything you can expect from reading about it.

“I challenge you to spend a day downtown observing and you may begin to realize that those on the street, although unlikely to vote in elections, are still human beings that you should care about.

“Please”—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I apologize; time is up.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's an honour to rise in the Legislature today to discuss a truly important campaign. April is Be a Donor Month here in the province of Ontario. Starting tomorrow, it is critical to raise awareness and encourage individuals to register and become an organ or tissue donor.

The need for organ and tissue donors is becoming even more apparent. There are almost 1,600 Ontarians on the wait-list for a transplant. Currently, there are more individuals on the wait-list than there is organ availability.

Sadly, every three days, somebody in Ontario dies a preventable death while waiting for a transplant as a result of limited availability.

Since April 1, 2020, registrations for organ and tissue donations in Ontario have decreased by more than 50% versus the same time a year ago.

I cannot stress enough how important being a donor is and its impact on other people's lives. One organ donor can save up to eight lives and enhance the lives of 75 individuals.

I want to clarify any potential misconceptions there are about registering to be a donor. Everyone has the potential to be a donor regardless of their age, medical condition or sexual orientation.

April 7 is also national Green Shirt Day. Green Shirt Day was inspired by Logan Boulet, who was one of the Humboldt Broncos who tragically passed away. Logan, a registered donor, saved six lives. In his memory, and to champion organ and tissue donation, I encourage everybody to wear green on April 7.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, this is the sixth day that Ontario has seen over 2,000 daily cases—today is the highest. We are now into a third wave, which is projected to be far worse than what we have experienced so far.

There are over 1,100 schools with reported COVID-19 cases and 58 schools which had to close down as of yesterday. Parents, families, children and youth are facing an incredible amount of uncertainty.

This government had more than a year now to prepare for what was coming. They had the opportunity to invest in safer learning environments for our children but chose to do otherwise.

I recently heard from a constituent, Donna, who is a mom to a 15-year-old. “Kids have been pivoted and bounced around a lot during this pandemic,” she shared, as she continued to tell us about how difficult it is to see her teenage son not have the opportunity to take a break.

Students are facing burnout and an unprecedented amount of mental health strain as they have to constantly switch between learning methods and see their safety and well-being undermined.

In the wake of yesterday's confusing back and forth between the Premier and the minister about whether or not to postpone the March break, Donna, like many parents, is frustrated with this government and their inability to provide clear messaging for students and families. Parents are worried for the safety and mental health of their children as they navigate this pandemic

It's time this government prioritizes education for the sake of families across this province and takes responsibility for parents, kids and education workers so that they're not left behind.

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PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Recently, I was honoured to join the Minister of Infrastructure, along with the federal Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Catherine McKenna; the federal Minister of Transport, Omar Alghabra; and the mayor of Mississauga, Bonnie Crombie, to announce a joint investment of over \$158 million in modern public transit infrastructure for the people of Mississauga. This includes \$56 million for a new two-way bus rapid transit corridor along Lakeshore Road in Mississauga–Lakeshore, with three new stations between East Avenue and Deta Road and connections to the GO Transit network, the Hurontario LRT, the TTC and pedestrian and cycling networks.

Together, we're building a modern and accessible inter-regional transit system that will support our growing population along the Lakeshore Road corridor. With 20,000 new residents in Lakeview Village on the site of the former coal plant and 8,000 new residents in Brightwater on the site of the former Texaco refinery, it is critical that we build the transit infrastructure we need to support this growth, both for our economic recovery and for the community's future.

Speaker, this announcement is also a great example of what we are able to achieve when we are working in partnership with the federal government and the municipalities. I'm looking forward to continuing to work together, both as we respond to the impacts of COVID-19 as we lay the groundwork for our recovery, and for a stronger, better and more progressive Ontario.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Mr. Jeff Burch: Many seniors in Niagara in their seventies have been patiently waiting for over a month to receive their vaccine. On the weekend, those over the age of 70 were told by the province that they could finally book an appointment. But on Monday, when the opportunity arrived, they found only disappointment. Dozens of seniors could not book online and could not get through on the hotline. Those who got through were told there were

no vaccines in Niagara and they didn't know when they would be there.

My office was flooded with calls from people like Angie Desmarais from Port Colborne, who said she spent all day on the website and making phone calls. She says, "Seniors have transportation and mobility issues, and this system makes things even more confusing."

Another senior from Port Colborne said she was offered an appointment at the Toronto Metro Convention Centre. John Neeley was told to just keep calling every day; there were no vaccines in Niagara—mass confusion, Speaker.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health stated he wasn't confident that there would be enough vaccine to vaccinate the 70 to 74 age group, and public health could only say that they were working with the province to let them know the issues and working to try and figure out what had happened.

This government had months to organize. It is extremely disappointing that this system is having so many issues and is so unfriendly to seniors, who are trying to protect themselves and others by following the rules and attempting to book their vaccine appointments but are unable to because this government has not organized the system properly.

We must do better for our seniors and their families, who have already endured so much throughout this pandemic.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. John Fraser: April is Be a Donor Month, and next Wednesday, April 7, will be Green Shirt Day. We won't be here; I want to remind all my colleagues to wear a green shirt next Wednesday. Green Shirt Day, of course, is in honour of the late Logan Boulet, whose organ donation saved six lives and inspired 100,000 donor signatures.

Almost 1,600 Ontarians are on a wait-list. Every three days, one of them loses their life while waiting to receive that really important donation that they need. Ontario's Trillium Gift of Life Network is called that for a reason. Organ donations can save up to eight lives and enhance up to 75 others through tissue donation.

With the pandemic, transplants are down and registrations are down over 50% from pre-pandemic levels. While 90% of Ontarians support organ donation, only 33% have signed up. In my riding of Ottawa South, it's 35%. There are families in my riding like the Therien family and Suzanne Camu and Marc Quinet and many others who are strong advocates for increasing organ donation.

We need to do more to help them. We need to do more to make people aware. We can do that, all of us who haven't already, by taking two minutes and going to beadonor.ca to register.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I'm elated to rise this morning to share groundbreaking news from my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. In 2017, Trillium Health Partners

and the government of Ontario announced an unfunded plan to support a major development and expansion of the Queensway Health Centre, located in the south end of my riding.

As outlined in the 2021 budget, our government took action and we are moving forward and finally getting shovels in the ground. The south Etobicoke community is growing rapidly, and I am glad that the need for greater access to localized health care is being recognized and actions are being taken.

Founded in 1956 as the Queensway General Hospital, the Queensway Health Centre is the product of an amalgamation between Trillium Health Partners and the Queensway General Hospital in 1998. The health centre has served the needs of our diverse community for decades, and this announcement is important to the continued development of south Etobicoke. The Queensway Health Centre expansion will include the creation of a modern post-acute facility for complex continuing care and rehabilitation patients to receive care and recover in a purpose-built environment, as well as a new parking structure.

Trillium Health Partners is Canada's largest hospital, with over 1.7 million patient visits annually and more than 277,000 visits per year to the emergency department and urgent care centre. Over the next 20 years, no hospital in Ontario will experience more growth in demand for services than the Trillium Health Partners hospital.

Thank you to the government of Ontario.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Bhutila Karpoche: People on social assistance are increasingly forced to make do with less. A disabled person on Ontario Disability Support Program is expected to live with an income of \$1,169 per month to cover rent, food, utilities and all other basic necessities. The rate is even lower for a person on Ontario Works, who is expected to cover all costs of living with only \$733 per month.

Social assistance rates fall well below the poverty line, and have remained stagnant despite skyrocketing housing costs, inflation and increasing prices of basic necessities. People on social assistance have been ignored for decades by successive governments, both Liberal and Conservative, and even ignored during the pandemic. Through the federal CERB program, we know that \$2,000 per month is the minimum that people need to survive. Yet when the government announced the budget last week, there were no rate increases to either ODSP or OW. In fact, poverty was not even mentioned once in the budget document.

At a time when it is more important than ever to ensure that no one is left behind, the government is turning its back on poor and disabled people. The government claims that the budget aims to protect people's health and Ontario's economy, but without providing long-overdue rate increases, this budget cannot achieve either goal.

I call on this government to listen to Ontarians, to increase rates and directly support people on ODSP and OW.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I wanted to rise today to speak about a cause close to my heart. Each April, Ontario commemorates Be a Donor Month to raise awareness about organ and tissue donation. I want to thank the staff at the Trillium Gift of Life Network for advocating on behalf of this important issue.

Currently, in Ontario, over 1,400 people are waiting for life-saving organs. Every three days, someone in Ontario dies waiting for a transplant. Only 35% of eligible health card holders are registered organ donors. Registration for organ and tissue donation in Ontario has decreased more than 50%. As we recover from the pandemic, the need for life-saving organs is higher than ever.

On April 6, 2018, the Humboldt Broncos hockey team met a tragic accident, which took the lives of 16 people, including 21-year-old Logan Boulet. Logan's organ donation saved six lives and inspired almost 150,000 organ donor registrations across Canada. Everyone is a potential donor, no matter your age, medical condition or sexual orientation.

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This April, I encourage all Ontarians to sit down with your loved ones to discuss registration as an organ donor. You can do it online at beadonor.ca. It will only take a few minutes to register online, and all you need is your Ontario health card number.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr. Parm Gill: Milton is one of the fastest-growing communities in the province, but it remains very tight-knit. That means more and more families are calling Milton home each and every day. As our community continues to grow, I'm proud that our government continues to support our growth.

This past Friday was a perfect example. It was a pleasure to attend the ground-breaking ceremony of yet another new school in Milton: Catholic elementary school #10, at Kennedy Circle. I was proud to be joined by the Minister of Education; our longest-serving mayor in the country, Mayor Krantz; Councillors Mike Cluett and Rick Di Lorenzo; our two Catholic board trustees, Marvin Duarte and Patrick Murphy; and also the director of education for the Catholic board, Patrick Daly.

This is the sixth new school for our community since June 2018, totalling over \$150 million in investment from our government for new schools in Milton. This is in addition to the \$18-million expansion of Bishop Reding and the \$3 million to St. Peter elementary school for a new child care centre.

As a proud father of three, I know how important investments like these are for our community. I am proud that our government continues to deliver for students and families in Milton.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this morning.

QUESTION PERIOD

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is to the Premier. It's really clear that we are heading into another lockdown, with more schools closing—in fact, probably all schools closing—and we know that the ICUs are becoming overwhelmed with COVID cases.

This is all on the government. It's all on the government. Back in February, there were warnings that the Premier needed to pay attention to, and he didn't. Experts were warning that things were going to get very, very bad. But what did the Premier say? The Premier said the numbers are looking rosy. And they weren't; he knew they weren't. Everybody knew that the numbers weren't looking rosy back in February when he claimed they were.

My question to the government—in fact, my question to the Minister of Health—is, was it her who told the Premier that the numbers were looking rosy and he could start lifting health precautions? If not, who on that side of the chamber gave the advice to the Premier that things were looking rosy and he could lift the precautions?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you, Speaker. Good morning. To the leader of the official opposition: No one has ever said throughout this pandemic that things are looking rosy.

From the very beginning of the pandemic, we have taken careful, measured steps to protect the health and well-being of every single Ontarian. We've done that by building up capacity in our hospitals and by making sure that we've been able to build up a robust testing strategy. We've been able to test over 12 million Ontarians already. We've also been able to administer over 2,190,000 vaccines.

We have taken careful, measured steps every step along the way in order to protect people's health and safety. No one takes this for granted. No one takes this carelessly. This is a very serious issue for every single person in the province of Ontario. We appreciate that, and we're dealing with that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In fact, there are now 421—it may be more as of this morning's numbers, which I haven't seen yet—ICU patients, the highest ever since the pandemic started. And this Premier, against all advice, decided to start lifting precautions when he knew it was a big risk, but he decided to take that risk anyway. In fact, when the Premier was saying that the numbers were looking pretty rosy, here's what Anthony Dale, from the Ontario Hospital Association, said on February 12: "Yesterday's modelling underscored the accelerating risk of highly contagious new COVID variants. The warning could not be clearer. An exhausted, overextended hospital sector is likely going to have to deal with a 3rd pandemic wave."

Will anyone on that bench—anyone—acknowledge or admit that the Premier’s behaviour, the Premier’s reckless decisions, led us right into this third wave?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Our government has always taken very careful consideration of the recommendations made by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the science table, the modelling table and the pandemic measures table. All of those people have been giving us their best advice. We anticipated, because of the variants of concern, which are now the dominant strain in the province of Ontario, that there would be an increase in hospitalizations. Because it is a more dominant strain, it’s more transmissible, and it’s more, unfortunately, deadly, so we did anticipate an increase in hospitalizations. That’s why we’ve increased the amount that we’ve put into our hospital system since the beginning to over \$5 billion, including \$1.8 billion in our most recent budget that allows for \$760 million to support the over 3,100 new beds that have been created in the province of Ontario in the last year, as well as \$300 million to reduce the surgical backlogs and \$778 million to support the hospitals in the work that they need to do to support the patients with COVID-19 coming in.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The government ignored the warning of doctors, of the science table, of experts, of front-line health care workers. They ignored the advice, and they rushed the opening without putting measures in place that should have been put in place—things like an evictions ban, things like real investments to make schools safer and reduce classroom sizes, things like paid time off for sick days and paid vaccination time. These are the things that everyone was saying were necessary to keep people safe. But it’s obvious what the Minister of Health is telling us: that they calculated the risk and decided it was okay to have ICUs overwhelmed, and it was going to be okay to have more people get sick with the variants, and it was going to be okay to have 421 people, and counting, in the ICUs, overwhelming our hospitals and basically putting our health care professionals in a very untenable position of exhaustion.

My question to the government is: How can you justify people losing their lives because you didn’t want to spend the money to put proper measures in place? Fourteen deaths yesterday: Explain that to the people of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members will please take their seats.

The Minister of Health to respond.

Hon. Christine Elliott: We have been following what’s happening in our hospitals very, very carefully, including conversations with Mr. Anthony Dale and other leaders of the hospitals. Our government, the Ontario Hospital Association, the Ontario Critical Care COVID-19 Command Centre are closely watching the province’s critical care capacity. While the situation is concerning—there’s no question about that—it is under control, and we’re going to continue to ensure that there’s capacity in hospitals across the province to provide care for COVID-

19 patients and any other person requiring hospitalization during this pandemic.

We are making the changes. We’ve got the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital that’s open. That is the overflow for some of the other cases. We’re looking at this regionally to make sure that hospitals can share some of the loads, and we’ve invested, as I indicated earlier, over \$5 billion in our hospital system since this pandemic began. We are watching carefully, and we’re responding to the need.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. After weeks of ignoring the warnings, the Premier yesterday told people to expect an announcement. My question is: Why is the Premier stringing people along? Why won’t he tell folks what to expect so that they can plan?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the Minister of Health and the government have been clear right from the onset. We will work very closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health. We will look at the data consistently in making those decisions. These are very difficult decisions that we are making on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario. They are guided by one thing only, and that is to keep people safe. We simply will not rush those decisions because the Leader of the Opposition is anxious. We will sit down with the science table, we will sit down with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and we will make these difficult, challenging decisions on behalf of the people of Ontario by looking at the data, because that’s what I think the people of the province of Ontario would expect. We have done that from the beginning, and we’ll continue to do that until we’ve defeated this pandemic.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Families need and deserve answers, but the government has left families, who are desperate to plan the next couple of weeks, hanging. Our ICUs have been literally told, “Expect to be overwhelmed.” That’s the government’s plan, to overwhelm our ICUs. Schools and students have record-high cases now of COVID-19, higher than ever in terms of the pandemic so far. Fourteen people, as I already mentioned, lost their lives to COVID-19 yesterday.

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Speaker, what is going on over there? Why are we in this position yet again? Why are we here again facing lockdowns, uncertainty, businesses closing, families not able to plan, schools closing, ICUs overwhelmed? Why are we here again?

Hon. Paul Calandra: As the Minister of Health has ably mentioned earlier, right from the onset, we have been working very closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health—not only the Chief Medical Officer of Health for the province of Ontario, but in all the different public health units across this province. This is a very difficult

and challenging pandemic. We have seen across the globe that circumstances have changed almost daily in different places. Despite that, we have been prepared.

The Minister of Health just highlighted the fact that we have put billions of dollars into ensuring that our hospital system has the capacity in order to react not only to the first wave but to anything that comes after that. We've increased ICU capacity. We've increased critical care capacity. We have done what is necessary to do. The Minister of Health is putting a number of resources, billions of dollars into extra resources, to ensure that our schools have been safe.

Is there more to do? Absolutely there is. Is there a crystal ball that tells us how this will end? No, but what we will do is put all the resources in to make sure that the people of the province of Ontario are ultimately successful in defeating this, and we are well on the road to doing that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For weeks the Premier has ignored the advice he was getting, and everybody knows it. We've been watching it play out right before our eyes. Here is what the head of the Ontario Hospital Association shared just yesterday in terms of what hospital leadership and health care leadership are saying: "This is the most worried I have been since this began." How can that be? How can that be, that after over a year, this is the most worried our health care professionals have been since it began? "For the first time in a long time"—another quote—"folks around here are scared."

Front-line health care workers are exhausted. They're tired, they're scared, they're frightened, because of the way this government has handled the pandemic. They deserve so much better from their Premier. They deserve better from their government.

After months of ignoring advice, why are we in the situation that we are? Protections were reduced and other precautions were not put in place when the government decided to open up too soon. So I guess the question is—they dragged us into a third wave; this government dragged us into a third wave—what's next?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health to respond.

Hon. Christine Elliott: One of the problems has been the variants of concern that, as the leader of the official opposition will know, have increased rapidly, resulting in more hospitalizations and more capacity required. That's why we have built that capacity into the system with the investments that we've made.

Mr. Dale, the OHA president, who you also just quoted, also said, "The OHA greatly appreciates the investments announced today and thanks the government of Ontario for providing hospitals with additional financial resources in an effort to maintain stability during this ongoing crisis."

We have given hospitals significant investments. We've allowed for \$1.8 billion more in our budget. We've also been creating over 500 intensive care beds and medicine beds. We also have opened the Cortellucci

Vaughan Hospital as an overflow to assist hospitals in the other area, and we are prepared to open field hospitals with the assistance of the federal government, which will create another 200 beds. One is ready to go in Sunnybrook and we can open another one in Hamilton if we need to. So we still have the ability to expand capacity, and we will make sure that every Ontarian who needs to be hospitalized will be hospitalized and get the care they deserve.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. This question is for the Minister of Education.

This government's laissez-faire approach to COVID-19 in schools has pushed families to the breaking point. Every day, more students and education workers are getting sick—a record high of 1,222 cases last week alone. More classes are being sent into isolation. More schools are being closed today. I just checked: A quarter of the schools in this province have reported cases. Despite all of the photo ops, the minister has failed week after week to reach his own goals for in-school testing. Parents are trying to understand why this government would repeatedly say they believe schools should remain open, but then do almost nothing to make sure they could stay that way. Yesterday, the Minister of Education admitted that "the risk profile has changed," so why hasn't his plan?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: We have followed the best advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. We have one of the lowest case rates for youth under 20 in the nation. That is not a coincidence. It's because we put in place a plan, endorsed by the medical community, that included masking, cohorting, stricter screening before children enter a school and expanded testing. In fact, under the Minister of Health's leadership, from March 7 to March 14, 57,000 tests were completed on youth under the age of 18.

We are fully committed to dealing with the increasing risks within our community. We appreciate that the rising risk in the community creates challenges for schools. But to put it into context—because the member opposite focused on the negative; let's reverse that and focus on what is taking place in schools today—75% of schools in Ontario do not have one active case, 98.69% of schools today are open and 99% of students have no case at all.

We appreciate the risk. We'll continue to elevate our plan and continue to invest to keep schools safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Back to the minister: Nothing to see here, eh? Nothing to see? The risk profile has changed because this government refused to act and walked us straight into a third wave. They held back funding when it was needed most, and that left schools vulnerable again.

I want to share with the minister something that Alison, a parent in my community, wrote this week. She says, "The safety precautions for primary students in September are well and truly the same and unchanged today. We are relying on luck to get us through the school year without potentially contracting COVID-19."

Speaker, parents were frustrated in the first and second waves. Now they're just plain furious that this has been allowed to happen again. Will the minister listen and act before more people get sick?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Certainly that constituent would appreciate knowing that the members opposite would have kept schools closed in 2021, which is contrary to the best interests of student mental health and development. For this government, we put in place a \$1.6-billion plan—it depends on the day in question period: They focus on the investment; the next day, it's a reduction in expenditure, but really the inconsistencies are—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: When it comes to the government, our consistency is an investment, is a plan endorsed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. The foremost medical leader in Ontario has given his stamp of approval on our plan. It is not a matter of luck that 75% of schools, while we face a third wave, do not have one case at all. It's not a matter of luck; it's because of prudent planning and listening to the best medical advice that 98.6% of schools remain open today as we deal with this global challenge.

We appreciate the risk. We've elevated our protocol with one-symptom screening, with quality masks, with the cohorting of students, with better cleaning and, of course, enhanced access to testing. We will continue to follow the best advice to keep every student and staff safe in this province.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is to the Minister of Long-Term Care. I was pleased to see the minister announce a new development project in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville two weeks ago. Tyndall Seniors Village has been allocated 73 new and 151 upgraded spaces. The project will result in a 224-bed home through the construction of a completely new building in and around Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Province-wide, there are 40,000 people on the wait-list. The Mississauga Halton LHIN has experienced some of the longest wait-lists for a long time, so it's very important that we are taking action to deal with the wait-list. With a population that grew while the previous government failed to build long-term care in the decades before, we need that capacity. What is the minister doing to build more capacity in Mississauga?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member for Mississauga East–Cooksville for the question and for his very important work on behalf of his constituents. His riding will be receiving the 73 new spaces he mentioned, and put together, all projects in Mississauga add up to almost 1,000 new spaces—993 new spaces, to be exact.

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The Legislature will need no reminding that in their last two terms of office, the Liberals built only 611 spaces. Our government is building one and a half times that amount in Mississauga alone. Our government is investing \$933 million in these projects on top of the \$1.75 billion already

dedicated to the delivery of 30,000 new spaces over 10 years. This work is so important. I am proud that it's a Conservative government that's getting it done after decades of talk from the opposition parties.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the minister for her response. My question is back to the Minister of Long-Term Care. That's actually great news for my constituents and all Mississauga residents.

As the minister will know, Tyndall Seniors Village is an older home and experienced a COVID-19 outbreak. We saw older homes across the province struggle to contain outbreaks. The pandemic has underlined the importance of upgrading older long-term-care spaces to modern design standards. We know this work is important, so I am glad to know the ministry is doing everything they can to speed up new long-term-care projects.

What is the minister doing to modernize long-term-care homes?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you for the question. The member for Mississauga East–Cooksville has really been a tireless representative for his community and his constituents, and I commend that.

The criteria for the latest allocation of new projects prioritized the upgrading of older homes in response to lessons learned around improved IPAC measures, particularly the elimination of three- and four-bed ward rooms.

He's right that modernizing this sector cannot wait, as it did under the previous government. Long-term care requires repair and rebuilding, and our government is doing just that with an aggressive modernization agenda. Ours is the government that is finally addressing upgrading older spaces and building new ones to fix the long-term-care sector that has been so badly neglected for 15 years.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Doly Begum: My question is to the Minister of Health. Speaker, provincial modelling data shows that Scarborough will have the third-highest amount of COVID-19 ICU cases by mid-April. This should be no surprise, since I have been talking in this House about how Scarborough has been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 for over a year now. My community is home to front-line essential workers, racialized people, low-income families and people living with many health conditions who have faced the worst of this pandemic for the last two waves, and wave three will be no different.

My team and I are in consistent communication with Scarborough Health Network, which has been running an efficient vaccination program to do their best and protect our community. However, with the capacity to vaccinate over 35,000 a week, their resources have been massively underutilized due to this government's systemic negligence of Scarborough, its vulnerability and its needs.

Last week, the Minister of Health finally answered my call for a commitment to an equitable vaccination strategy. So my question is, Mr. Speaker, has there been any work

done to ensure that Scarborough receives an equitable amount of vaccines consistent with the risk that our community is facing and our vaccination capacity?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member for the question. The short answer to your question is yes, but it depends on the supply that we receive. We are still waiting to receive large quantities of the AstraZeneca supply. We know that the 1.5 million doses are now in Canada and going to the federal government. We're still waiting to find out when they will be received by Ontario, at which time the doses will be distributed equitably across all of the 34 public health units, including Toronto and specifically Scarborough.

We also know that there are certain hot spots in areas across Ontario. Scarborough would be one of them. That's why we've also invested \$12.5 million into a community prioritization committee to be able to go into communities, working with community health partners, community health centres and so on, to be able to bring the vaccines to people, because we know that some people are not able to get to mass vaccination centres. There may be language problems, transportation problems, other problems, and trust and vaccine-hesitancy issues. So we are going to bring the vaccines to the people in a number of communities, including many in Scarborough.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to provide the minister with some statistics. For the week of March 29 to April 4, Scarborough Health Network was given 15,210 doses. For the week of April 5 to 11, Scarborough Health Network was given 3,510 doses. We have over 650,000 people living in Scarborough. The amount of doses given to our health network reduced by 23%, Mr. Speaker. This is unacceptable. It almost looked like an error to me, to be honest.

I'm once again asking the minister: Why has Scarborough Health Network, a body in charge of protecting and serving over 600,000 people in Scarborough, not been given an equitable amount of vaccines? Can the minister explain these numbers?

Hon. Christine Elliott: First, I would agree with you that Scarborough Health Network is doing an amazing job distributing vaccines. I have visited one of their centres at Centennial College. They're doing a great job, and the front-line health care workers—doctors, nurses, pharmacists—are all on deck to deliver the vaccines.

The problem is, we don't have sufficient volumes of those vaccines just yet. We are receiving the Pfizer vaccines; that's true. The Moderna vaccines have been delayed several times. We're still waiting for them to be received. They were to have been received last week and now won't be received until April 7, and even then we're not sure on that date. AstraZeneca, as I indicated earlier, we don't know when that's coming, and the J&J, we still don't have a timeline for when they'll be received.

To all of the members that are concerned about their public health units not receiving greater volumes of vaccines, it's because of the supply issue. As soon as we receive them, we will be distributing them to the public

health units, because we want to get needles into people's arms across the province as soon as we can.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is to the Minister of Health. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Health and the Premier for ensuring that the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital remains on the government's radar. The hospital was included in the budget on the list of older hospital facilities supported for redevelopment and rebuild. Welcome as this news is, it has raised questions throughout the south Georgian Bay area. My constituents are asking me what it means, since the hospital was also mentioned in the government's 2019 budget.

So I ask the minister: Can Collingwood expect a brand new hospital on the land that is being donated for that purpose, or are we looking at a redevelopment on the current site? Does the minister have a timeline that she can share with my constituents?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Our government is committed to making sure that our health care system has the tools and resources it needs in order to provide world-class care to all Ontarians. That's why, in our recently announced budget, we have included a revised capital plan, which will see over \$30 billion invested over the next 10 years, including an additional \$3 billion in the 2021 budget in hospital infrastructure.

The Collingwood redevelopment project will expand the level of patient-centred care we're able to provide, which will ensure residents' needs are being met close to their homes. We are going to work closely with the Collingwood hospital as they move through the stages of planning to ensure that improved patient care is at the centre of this significant investment.

We look forward to working with you and with your hospital to ensure that the residents of your community receive the excellent health care that they deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the minister: Thank you, Minister, for that answer.

Speaker, the minister will recall that this House, last November, unanimously supported my private member's resolution to support planning for hospital redevelopments in both Collingwood and Alliston. As would be expected, people in the southern end of my riding were disappointed to see that there was no mention of Stevenson Memorial Hospital in the recent budget, even though it was also mentioned in the 2019 budget.

Can the minister assure my constituents that Stevenson Memorial Hospital remains on the drawing board, and can the minister provide a timeline of when we might expect shovels in the ground?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I can certainly assure the member that Stevenson remains on the drawing board. It is something that we are very committed to dealing with, and we're extensively consulting with the hospital as the planning progresses. As you know, the hospital recently

moved from stage 1 to stage 2 in the ministry's capital planning process last year.

Obviously, it's important to remember, and I know you know this already, that when you are planning for an investment this significant, you need to take the time to make sure that it gets done right. But it is moving forward, it is in stage 2, and we are committed to working with our hospital partners to make sure the investments are going to be carried out efficiently and at the right scale.

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Additionally, in 2020, we did provide a \$1-million planning grant increase, which ensures that the total planning grant now is \$1.5 million, which will assist the project moving further towards construction as they complete the planning on it.

Both hospitals are certainly within our sights and are certainly moving forward. Thank you for the question.

TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: COVID-19 has left disastrous impacts on our economy in this province, and continues to have a negative impact over the year. Businesses affected by this pandemic continue to face uncertainty every single day. With each day this pandemic looms in Ontario, more businesses are in need of support.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries: Minister, this government tabled a budget just a week ago. Can you please tell us how this government will support Ontario's heritage, sport, tourism and culture industries, who have been hardest-hit during this pandemic?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Before I answer the question to the honourable member, I just wanted to say thank you to the people of Nepean. Fifteen years ago today, myself, the health minister and Peter Tabuns from Toronto—Danforth walked into this assembly after we were elected. So I wanted to say thank you to the people of Nepean and, formerly, of Carleton for the privilege and the honour to stand in this assembly for the past 15 years.

Interjection: Glad you're here.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you.

The member here raises a significant issue: The sectors that I represent were hit first, hardest. They will take the longest to recover post-COVID-19. I spent the day on Monday with the finance minister and the Premier in Niagara Falls, a city of 90,000 that lost 40,000 hospitality jobs at the beginning of this pandemic. Also, I come from Ottawa, the nation's capital, where the third-largest sector and industry is tourism, so I've seen it first-hand across the province, which is why we were so successful in arranging with the finance minister historic investments into these sectors: over \$930 million we're able to access. I'll get into the actual investments in the supplemental.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you, Minister. The weather is slowly getting warmer, spring is well under way, and soon we will be enjoying the summer months here in

Ontario. Among the hardest-hit by the pandemic have been those in the tourism sector, and many of those tourism businesses are seasonal and rely on the summer months.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, can the minister please provide more details on how this government is ensuring that those in the tourism and hospitality industry receive the support they are desperately in need of leading into the summer?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: First and foremost, we've set up a tourism, economic development and recovery task force, led by former MPP and opposition leader Tim Hudak. They will be working on an itinerary-based travel incentive—when it's safe to do so; we're not suggesting it is right now, but we want to be prepared for hyperlocal tourism in the days and months ahead.

In addition, we are looking at gateway cities. The destinations of Toronto and Ottawa have been decimated; we want to make sure we provide them with a great level of support with their international airports, their major convention centres, and of course, most of the cultural assets in the province are there.

Finally, we want to work on signature destinations, like Muskoka, like Blue Mountain, like the Thousand Islands and other places across the province. But directly, we are investing over \$200 million into sport and recreation infrastructure, over \$100 million in business grants, over \$100 million in tourism recovery programs, \$50 million for religious and cultural institutions, \$10 million for the arts, \$10 million for agri-tourism, \$260 million in an incentive to get people back in training, a \$150-million travel tax incentive, \$50 million for our regional tourism organizations, \$1.3 million for regional-based resources, \$3.9 million for provincial parks and, of course, \$10 million that will be going toward other activities. So we're really excited about supporting these—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The next question.

IMMUNISATION CONTRE LA COVID-19 COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est pour le premier ministre. Pendant que le programme de vaccination de ce gouvernement est tout croche, les communautés du nord de l'Ontario doivent faire preuve de leur créativité. Le bureau de santé publique Porcupine fait l'impossible pour assurer que les plus vulnérables aient accès au vaccin le plus vite possible, avec un nombre limité de vaccins dans une région très vaste et avec une population vieille et sans accès à la technologie. Le bureau de santé a donc fait appel à la communauté pour aider à contacter les résidents pour les faire vacciner.

Ma question est très simple : où sont le premier ministre et son gouvernement dans cette situation-ci?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Health to respond.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I thank the member very much for the question. Actually, we have achieved great success in the north, especially with Operation Remote Immunity. That was developed in association with First Nations

leaders, with Ornge, and allowed for 31 fly-in communities to receive their first doses. We're now working on the second doses for those residents.

We're also working with the local public health units, because while we have one overall vaccine plan with three phases, we know that the situation is different in different parts of Ontario. What works in Toronto isn't going to work in your region. Windsor is different; Ottawa is different. So, the local medical officers of health have been developing their own plan to make sure that their own residents can be vaccinated, which is the way we planned it to be, recognizing that they know their own areas best. I congratulate the regional health officer in your area for doing that because they know the best way to reach the residents, and that is perfectly in accordance with our plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: Northerners are used to being creative and resourceful, because this government has left them on their own will. My office has been helping to book vaccination appointments for elderly residents who have no access to technology, live alone and don't have a caregiver.

Will this government put their money where their mouth is and step up to the challenge, or will they continue to play "Where's Waldo?" with the good people of Mushkegowuk—James Bay?

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say to the member we have already put hundreds of millions of dollars into this project. We already have our online booking tool that is doing a great job. They have already booked over 850,000 appointments. It's operating well. There are some glitches here and there—I certainly will acknowledge that—but overall, the system is doing a great job.

But we also recognize that there are many residents who are not computer-literate. They don't feel comfortable booking online. We still have our booking tool, the call centre, where people can call. They speak a number of different languages so that if people are more comfortable making the appointment via phone, they certainly can do that. That is available across Ontario, including northern Ontario. Every part of Ontario is booked into this system.

EDUCATION FUNDING

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: My question is to the Minister of Education. Last summer, this government told school boards to use their reserve funds to hire additional staff and create space to allow for greater social distancing in classrooms. Reserve funds are meant for repairs to school infrastructure and to build new facilities. To date, this government has not committed to reimbursing school boards forced to deplete these funds in order to keep kids safe at school. In fact, there was no mention of reserve funding in last week's budget, something that is understandably concerning to all school boards. The budget also confirmed that this government is cutting \$1.6 billion from the education budget for the 2021 school year.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain why he decided that school boards do not deserve any reimbursement for the reserve funds they were forced to spend to make their schools safe—a job that should be up to the government?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed, the government did step up with a \$1.6-billion investment. We believe every level of government, our school boards, our federal government and, yes, this province must be prepared to invest in the protection of children and quality education. We actually welcome the co-operation of everyone to be part of the solution.

We have invested an additional \$700 million more in the budget, underscoring our commitment to public education. We have an upcoming announcement about the Grants for Student Needs, which is our principal funding vehicle for school boards. All members and all parents will see an increase in expenditure in mental health, special education and STEM learning and a focus on learning loss for reading and for mathematic supports.

We recognize that there's more we can do. We will continue to step up in partnership with our boards, with all Canadians, all Ontarians, to make sure that schools remain safe and that we maintain excellence in learning in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question?

M^{lle} Amanda Simard: Back to the minister: Throughout this pandemic, educational assistants and early childhood educators have often been overlooked. EAs and ECEs work long hours in close quarters with students, helping them eat, taking their hand, and toileting. They often work with students who have behavioural issues. Many don't understand the importance of physical distancing and wearing a mask, putting these workers at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19. Many are refusing work or are leaving the profession because of mask exemptions and high EA-to-student ratios, which remained unchanged during the pandemic.

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EAs and ECEs are understandably concerned for their health and that of their families. They simply don't feel safe.

What additional measures is this government taking to protect the safety of EAs and ECEs during the third wave, and how does the minister plan to stabilize this vital workforce when they're cutting \$1.6 billion from the budget?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Indeed, there are 409 more EAs in Ontario because of our government's investments; an additional 330 childhood educators because of our government's investments. I appreciate the member recognizing the increase.

What I would also note is that when it comes to vaccinations—two points. The first is, this government prioritized education staff. All of them, including the hard-working EAs, ECEs, childhood educators, our bus drivers, our educators—everyone is in phase 2, which I think underscores the commitment of the government to make sure that these front-line staff who cannot work from home get access to the vaccine as soon as possible.

The limitation is our access to supply. As we get more vaccines, we'll be able to accelerate the delivery to these critical workers, who are really doing an important job to support our kids and keep them safe.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to continue to invest, but I think the most important thing we can do is to work with the federal government to get these vaccines to this province so we can get them into the arms of Canadians.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Climate change is a complex problem that poses serious challenges for all countries around the world. To be able to tackle this very important issue requires continuous collaboration between governments, the private sector and the people of Ontario, working together to drive more innovative and effective solutions.

Mr. Speaker, the constituents in my riding of Mississauga–Lakeshore have expressed concern about the worsening impacts of climate change and the effects it continues to have on our local communities. Now, more than ever, they want to know that their government is serious about climate change and willing to step up their efforts to address this important environmental challenge.

So my question for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is, can he assure me today that tackling climate change is a top priority for our government?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I want to thank the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for the question and his strong advocacy, on behalf of his constituents, for a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

Mr. Speaker, up to this point, I've been very clear that this government takes the threat of climate change very seriously. That's why I recently announced an investment of \$20 million over four years for the Greenlands Conservation Partnership. This initiative will advance our actions in the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, like protecting vulnerable and sensitive natural areas, such as wetlands and other important habitats, through good policy, strong science and partnerships. It will help mitigate the effects of climate change and increase the number of conserved natural spaces for the public to enjoy.

I can assure the member that having healthy communities and a healthy environment will always be the top priorities for this government. We know that tackling climate change is a key part of achieving this.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for his dedication to the people of Ontario and to the environment.

My community cares deeply about the environment and will be happy to hear that our government is taking real action on climate change.

Mr. Speaker, after a long winter, the warm weather is finally on its way, and this means Ontarians will be looking to spend more time experiencing the outdoors. Now, more than ever, people all across Ontario are looking for

more opportunities to discover the beautiful green spaces our province has to offer.

Can the minister please tell this House how this investment will ensure more people can access Ontario's natural areas?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks again for the question from the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the positive impacts getting outdoors has for both our physical and mental health.

I, too, am enjoying much time out hiking with my wife. We currently go to Catfish Creek Conservation Authority, Springwater. It's a great nature trail, seven kilometres long.

It's a beautiful time to get out with the family and actually enjoy nature. I encourage all Ontarians, if they have the opportunity, to get outside and enjoy nature.

Our investment is supporting that type of activity by expanding our natural areas. It's going to increase opportunities for Ontarians to go hiking, fishing, boating, or taking out their mountain bike and doing some trail riding.

This investment is just one of many the government is making to expand access to outdoor recreation and strengthen protections for our environment. We will continue to focus on delivering the commitments in our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan and continue to address the challenges of climate change and promote healthy natural spaces.

CAREGIVERS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Last week, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario released a decision that shows how the Premier and his government's inaction to ensure congregate care residents have meaningful access to their essential caregivers discriminated against a child with disabilities.

The tribunal found that the child had been adversely affected and that human rights protections do not go away in a pandemic. It shouldn't be left up to each service provider to do the right thing. The government should have stepped up and legislated visitations to ease the adverse effects of isolation, and made it clear that residents should be allowed outside care homes for sunshine and fresh air.

Speaker, with this decision from the tribunal, why does this government continue to facilitate breaching the rights of thousands of congregate care residents in group homes, long-term-care homes and others across the province? Why won't they pass my More Than a Visitor Act and immediately reunite these families once and for all?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant, the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: We are aware of the recent decision of the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario and our ministry is reviewing the decision.

Our top priority remains the health, safety and well-being of children, youth, adults and families in Ontario, including those in our congregate care settings. We're working with service providers so that they can continue to provide services safely and efficiently, while following

the guidance set out by provincial and local public health experts. Guidelines issued by our ministry have been developed in consultation with the Ministry of Health to protect the health and well-being of residents and staff in congregate care settings.

Through the province's COVID-19 Response Framework, we help service providers operating congregate care settings to implement infection prevention and control precautions relative to the identified levels of risk within their local communities. I will be pleased in the supplementary to talk about more of those measures.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: This government has been waiting and seeing and considering things for 15 months, while some residents in congregate care, like long-term care, are literally dying of isolation.

Thousands of congregate care residents across the province have been denied meaningful—or, in some cases, any—access to their designated caregivers for over a year now. Many have been denied going outdoors for fresh air and sunshine. Yesterday, they were begging you to let them outside.

This landmark decision from the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario makes it clear: The province had no authority to unilaterally remove the rights of congregate care residents in the name of pandemic response. With thousands of residents in congregate care in Ontario, this Conservative government can expect many more human-rights-violations decisions based on this precedent-setting ruling, while they continue to facilitate denying care home residents meaningful access to their family caregivers and confining them to their rooms.

The government has had a legislative solution in front of them since September 2020, one they could pass today to stop human rights violations they continue to perpetuate. Why won't the Premier pass my More Than a Visitor Act and stop violating the human rights of residents in congregate care?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: As I said in my initial answer, the protection and safety of our individuals in congregate care settings is of paramount concern for our government. We're doing what we can to prevent the spread of COVID-19 while enabling families and individuals in congregate care settings to connect with one another as safely as possible throughout this difficult period.

Our government has taken a number of actions to prioritize their safety. Through the COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable People, we implemented measures that will help to stop COVID-19 at the door of these facilities, through measures like enhanced screening and the use of PPE, and managing outbreaks when they do happen, which includes enhanced testing and contact tracing. We have also made investments of up to \$40 million in support of the COVID-19 Residential Relief Fund. This support covers eligible costs such as additional staffing, residential respite for caregivers and personal protective equipment and supplies.

This is going to continue to be a key priority. We are going to protect our individuals in congregate care, and we're going to make sure that we can weather—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question.

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TAXATION

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: Good morning. My question is for the Premier. Last week, this government lost its challenge to the federal government's carbon pricing legislation at the Supreme Court of Canada. Funny enough, this government had already made a deal with the Justin Trudeau Liberal government to implement two carbon taxes in Ontario: one administered by the federal government for consumers and one administered by this provincial government on industry.

Can the government tell us whether they feel they've put forward the best legal arguments possible at the Supreme Court to fight the federal carbon tax? Because the deal made with the federal Liberal government seems to suggest the Ontario government had already thrown in the towel.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To respond, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I thank the member opposite for that question. I know she was with us when we passed our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan that we have been implementing. One of those key aspects of that plan was to bring forward our emissions performance standards, which we have worked with the federal government to institute. That is going to be a fair but tough regulation put in place to keep Ontario competitive, but at the same time, it's working to reduce those big-polluting emitters' greenhouse-gas emissions so that we're able to work towards our goal of a 30% decrease in emissions below 2005 levels by our 2030 commitment.

This is in addition to our plan to introduce a hydrogen strategy for this province. This is a plan, moving forward, that's going to allow us to open up a new economy, that's going to mean low-carbon-emitting vehicles, low-carbon-emitting buses and trains. It's also going to allow us to store energy mixed with natural gas to decrease GHGs in our heating in our houses. I look forward to implementing this plan further.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The supplementary question.

Mrs. Belinda C. Karahalios: In legal challenges, judges only make decisions based on the evidence and the arguments provided by both sides. It seems to me this government spent over \$20 million to fight this federal carbon tax legislation in court, only to concede to the federal government on the facts of the case and to concede to the federal government their arguments in two of the three stages of the legal analysis.

On the one hand, the Premier's rhetoric was to say the carbon tax is a cash grab that will do nothing for the environment, but in legal filings, this government agreed that the federal carbon tax is a way to help the environment. Can the government tell us how they expected to

win in court when they conceded the facts and two thirds of the legal arguments to the federal government on the federal carbon tax legislation?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much for that supplemental. We are disappointed with the Supreme Court's decision on the carbon tax issue. We were elected with a mandate from the people of this province to do everything we could to make life more affordable for families and businesses throughout the province. We take the Supreme Court's decision and respect it, even though we do disagree with it.

We do know that climate change is an issue in this province. It's a threat to this province. It's a threat to our economy. It's a threat to the people throughout Ontario. We are taking measures through our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan to not only fight climate change and reduce our emissions but also, at the same time, to protect our land, air and water, because we believe that's what the people of this province want. We're going to continue to implement this plan, which is a flexible plan. It's not a one-size-fits-all for the entire province. People in northern Ontario, southern Ontario, the GTA and Toronto each need their own specific plan in order to fight climate change and protect the environment, and that's what we're supplying to the people of this province.

UNIVERSITY FUNDING

Mr. Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. Laurentian University is Canada's sole university with a tri-cultural mandate to support French, English and Indigenous communities, but also the third-largest employer in my riding of Sudbury. Laurentian employs over 850 people. They educate more than 6,000 students.

The minister said he was aware of Laurentian's problems six months ago, but instead of taking immediate action, Laurentian is now under CCAA creditor protection, a process that should never have been used for a public institution. Robert Haché, the president of Laurentian University, recently said that if significant restructuring plans are not approved, "the university will cease to function as of April 30," which would be devastating for Sudbury's economy, for students, for workers and for northern Ontario.

My question is: Will the Premier commit to keeping Laurentian University open past April 30? And what is the Premier willing to do to save Laurentian University?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Education.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Obviously, we are very concerned about what's taking place at Laurentian University. We have appointed a special adviser. The Minister of Colleges and Universities have appointed Alan Harrison in response. Dr. Harrison's work is to provide advice and recommendations to the ministry regarding the financial situation at Laurentian and also to offer perspective on governance and strategic planning to help them get through this difficulty.

I will note that this province, under Minister Romano's leadership, invested \$106 million, the largest investment

in the country when it comes to supporting post-secondary institutions through COVID-19. I'm also aware that Laurentian University, over the past five years, has received close to \$80 million in supports.

We're going to continue to be there for Laurentian. After all, more than 40% of Laurentian's total revenue is from the province, compared to 23% for the rest of the post-secondary sector, underscoring our commitment both to French-language education and education in northern Ontario as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the supplementary?

Mr. Jamie West: Back to the Premier: For weeks, the people of Sudbury and northern Ontario have been begging the Conservative government to cancel the CCAA process at Laurentian or to provide emergency funding to lessen the likelihood of drastic cuts.

The Minister of Education recently bragged about the \$106 million in emergency funding for post-secondary institutions. Surprisingly, not one dime of that was for Laurentian University. They say the money was intended for institutions most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but excluded the only post-secondary institution currently facing insolvency.

The CCAA process at Laurentian will end soon and experts fear that this will result in devastating cuts. Will the Premier finally step in and save Laurentian from drastic cuts?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, Laurentian received \$10.4 million from the ministry and over \$1.1 million from the federal government as well to develop and offer French-language post-secondary programs and services. As I noted, Laurentian received, to date, roughly 40% of grants from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities when compared to other institutions of roughly 23%, underscoring a clear commitment to this institution to education in the north and to French-language preservation and making sure we have access to the good work that they do.

The northern Ontario special purpose grant was extended to Laurentian, for \$6 million. The teacher education stabilization grant was extended to Laurentian University. The graduate expansion program was provided in the past, and the Northern Tuition Sustainability Fund was also extended.

We appreciate there were challenges. We've appointed Dr. Harrison to lead them through this difficulty with a commitment to continue to support the students at Laurentian University.

CITY OF OTTAWA

Mr. Stephen Blais: My question is for the Premier. Recently, the government announced appointments to the board of Invest Ontario, and it's a very interesting list. While it's chock full of Conservative Party insiders, what it doesn't have is anyone from Ottawa's business community.

Now, the tourism minister from Ottawa has travelled the province telling us how important tourism will be to our economic recovery, and I agree. Tourism is Ottawa's third-largest sector. Not only is nobody from Ottawa's tourism sector included in Invest Ontario, in 2019 the government cut Ottawa Tourism's budget by 15%, pulling \$3.4 million out of Ottawa Tourism.

But there's more. Ottawa is home to the largest tech park in the country. Tech will be a foundation of Ontario's economic recovery, but as the Ford government opens the door to business, it closes the door on Ottawa's tech sector.

Mr. Speaker, how can there be no representation from Ottawa's two largest private sector industries? How does the government justify excluding Ottawa business leaders from their new investment attraction agency?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: If the member opposite actually followed along with the Ontario budget, we've invested over \$930 million into these hard-hit sectors. In addition, Michael Crockatt, the president and CEO of Ottawa Tourism, is not only a member of my task force, he is also going to be key in making sure that we recover our gateway cities, which we've been very clear about.

Cyril Leeder, an Ottawa resident, the former president and CEO of the Ottawa Senators, is chairing my amateur sport and my professional sport organization. We have representation from all of our festivals and events in the city of Ottawa. Just last week, myself and the finance minister visited some of the high-tech communities inside that do work with our digital interactive media as well as his. The finance minister and Treasury Board president has been, with the Minister of Long-Term Care, in our high-tech sector.

I can tell you, the Ottawa people that are represented on our boards, agencies and commissions—it has never been more extended than it is now, and I can tell you that with respect to tourism—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The supplementary?

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Mr. Stephen Blais: I'm waiting with bated breath, Mr. Speaker. We've established that the government doesn't respect Ottawa's business community and has no plan to put any Ottawa business leaders on Invest Ontario. This week, it was revealed that Ottawa isn't receiving its per capita share of COVID-19 vaccinations. Ottawa represents 7% of Ontario's population but, despite being in the higher-risk zones, has only received 5.7% of the doses. That's nearly 20% fewer doses than the per capita share. And before the minister or their government talks about Justin Trudeau and vaccine supply, this is about the proportion of vaccines you've already received. You've already received these vaccines. It's about our fair share in Ottawa.

Thousands of seniors went without appointments because of a foul-up in the system this week. They haven't been able to book, and we're behind as a result, because we're not getting our fair share of vaccines. Mr. Speaker,

why is Ottawa always an afterthought for this government?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The House will come to order. The Minister of Health to reply.

Hon. Christine Elliott: I would say thank you to the member for the question, but to the contrary, we're happy to report that last week, Ottawa received its largest shipment of vaccines to date. It should also be noted that last year, Ottawa was one of the first public health units to receive a shipment of the Pfizer vaccines in the province.

But it's not only that; we're also happy to report that through the High Priority Communities Strategy of \$12.5 million—Ottawa is receiving its share of that, because there is money and vaccines that are going to the South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre. I would say, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, Ottawa is being very well served with the vaccine priority rollout.

COVID-19 IMMUNIZATION

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. My office is being flooded with calls and emails from people in Oshawa and from across the Durham region about vaccines. Everyone is concerned about the health and well-being of their loved ones. Durham region needs more access for more people to more vaccines. There are vaccine doses sitting in freezers in Ontario. We need to ensure that all communities have what they need, and Durham region has need. Durham region health department is now at the top of the list, with the fifth-highest number of cases per capita.

We are all stressed and struggling with the threat of more lockdowns. People deserve fair access to vaccines. It does not make sense that Durham region has been left out of the government pharmacy pilot for the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Will the Premier commit today to meeting the needs of people in Oshawa and to adding Durham region pharmacies to the AstraZeneca pilot program?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Health.

Hon. Christine Elliott: Yes, as soon as we receive the vaccines. Right now, we have already used 98% of the 194,500 vaccines that were sent to us that have a time limit of April 2. So they will be expiring, but they will be used. We will not let one dose go to waste.

As far as the vaccine rollout into pharmacies across Ontario, we have actually planned for at least three pharmacies in every public health unit to be able to receive the vaccines and to vaccinate the people that live in that region. But we don't have the vaccines yet. They're here, they're in Canada, but we still don't have any indication from the federal government as to when we actually will receive them. As soon as we do, we will be shipping them to pharmacies across Ontario.

There is also a myth that there are a lot of vaccines sitting in freezers. That is not the case. All of those vaccines have already been allocated to someone. They are

already spoken for. We are making sure that every vaccine is used as soon as we receive it, because that is our goal: to protect everyone in the province of Ontario.

DEFERRED VOTES

SUPPORT WORKERS PAY ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LA RÉMUNÉRATION DES PRÉPOSÉS AUX SERVICES DE SOUTIEN

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 266, An Act respecting minimum pay for support workers / Projet de loi 266, Loi concernant la rémunération minimale des préposés aux services de soutien.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes. I'll ask the Clerks to prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1135 to 1205.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 266, An Act respecting minimum pay for support workers, has been held.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 28; the nays are 39.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There being no further business at this time, this House stands in recess until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1206 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 257, An Act to enact the Building Broadband Faster Act, 2021 and to make other amendments in respect of infrastructure and land use planning matters / Projet de loi 257, Loi édictant la Loi de 2021 sur la réalisation accélérée de projets d'Internet à haut débit et apportant d'autres modifications en ce qui concerne les infrastructures et des questions d'aménagement du territoire.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to the order of the House dated March 23, 2021, the bill is ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE POLICY

Mr. Parm Gill: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Justice Policy and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Meghan Stenson): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 246, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 246, Loi modifiant le Code de la route.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Wong): Your committee begs to report the following bills, without amendment:

Bill Pr41, An Act to revive 2560462 Ontario Ltd.

Bill Pr44, An Act to revive 2353043 Ontario Inc.

Bill Pr50, An Act to revive Whittrick N D T Services Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND LONG-TERM CARE AMENDMENT ACT (ADVANCED GLUCOSE MONITORING DEVICES), 2021

LOI DE 2021 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE MINISTÈRE DE LA SANTÉ ET DES SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE (APPAREILS ET ACCESSOIRES AVANCÉS DE SURVEILLANCE DE LA GLYCÉMIE)

Mr. Natyshak moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 272, An Act to amend the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Act with respect to the inclusion of advanced glucose monitoring devices in the Assistive Devices Program / Projet de loi 272, Loi modifiant la Loi

sur le ministère de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée en ce qui concerne l'inclusion des appareils et accessoires avancés de surveillance de la glycémie dans le Programme d'appareils et accessoires fonctionnels.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'll invite the member for Essex to briefly explain his bill.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much for your indulgence, Speaker.

The bill amends section 6 in the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Act to require the Assistive Devices Program to include flash glucose monitoring devices and continuous glucose monitoring devices.

My father, Boris Natyshak, was a type 1 diabetic since he was 16 years old. He has since passed; it has been two years. When he first got that technology and was able to continuously monitor the glucose in his blood sugar levels, he called it a level of freedom that he had never experienced in his entire life.

It is indeed an honour to table this bill in his memory and hopefully afford those who have type 1 diabetes access to the same type of freedom that my dad experienced.

ENDOMETRIOSIS AWARENESS MONTH ACT, 2021

LOI DE 2021 SUR LE MOIS DE SENSIBILISATION À L'ENDOMÉTRIOSE

Ms. Stiles moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 273, An Act to proclaim March as Endometriosis Awareness Month / Projet de loi 273, Loi proclamant le mois de mars Mois de sensibilisation à l'endométriose.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Davenport can briefly explain the bill.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very pleased to introduce this bill on behalf of myself and also my colleague and co-sponsor, the member for Toronto Centre.

Endometriosis is a disease experienced by one in 10 women, trans people, non-binary people—menstruators of reproductive age. Although this is a common condition that causes extreme pain, nausea and other symptoms, it often goes undiagnosed because of stigma and shame, leaving those who experience it to suffer in silence.

Recognizing March as Endometriosis Awareness Month in Ontario will bring an excellent opportunity to educate and inform the public about this disease.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'm pleased to present this petition on behalf of folks from my riding. It reads as follows:

“Stop Ford's Education Cuts.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Doug Ford's new education scheme seeks to dramatically increase class sizes starting in grade 4;

“Whereas the changes will mean thousands fewer teachers and education workers and less help for every student;

“Whereas secondary students will now be forced to take at least four of their classes online, with as many as 35 students in each course;

“Whereas Ford's changes will rip over \$1 billion out of Ontario's education system by the end of the government's term; and

“Whereas kids in Ontario deserve more opportunities, not fewer;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Demand that the government halt the cuts to classrooms and invest to strengthen public education in Ontario.”

I support this petition. I'll be affixing my signature and then tabling it with the Clerks.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE OF ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2021

LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 30, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 269, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 269, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm very pleased to be able to stand and put a few remarks in debate today for Bill 269, the Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021.

For a very long time, leading up to the budget, our offices were hearing from agencies, hearing from organizations, hearing from folks who are extremely concerned about how challenging it is to get by in the province right now. There have been specific concerns brought to our offices about programs like the small business grants and how that is unrolling and unfolding—the challenges there. We've seen emails by the truckload about money spent in

health care, about the need for a comprehensive vaccine strategy. People are very concerned about the health and wellness of their loved ones. Parents are very concerned about the state of public education—not only what it looks like now, but what it will look like in future.

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Speaker, I'm bringing all of those pieces into the Legislature today—to be able to share some of their stories, to get some of their concerns on the record, because this budget, frankly, was a missed opportunity. I'm certain we're going to have a lively debate. I know that the government is going to hold up some of the investments that they're making. They're going to talk about their priorities—and I'm very glad to hear about the few things that they have listened to from the community.

Speaker, I'm going to take this opportunity to congratulate the fine folks at Grandview Kids. Grandview Children's Centre has been in my riding of Oshawa for a long time doing remarkable work. They have been lifting families with children with special needs. They have been helping them to navigate not just the province, but the world. The hopeful stories of success from Grandview Kids are just remarkable. I know that is something the government members and I have in common—we have all been working alongside Grandview Children's Centre to secure funding, a new building. It has been quite a journey, and it has been a journey of the heart. So I want to congratulate all of the folks at Grandview Kids, their board, and Lorraine Sunstrum-Mann, who's the CEO. I've been very proud to work alongside them for so many years. While I'm excited about the new build, their new journey, their new chapter in Ajax, right now they're right up the street from me in Oshawa, and I'm going to miss them. I wish them well, and I am pleased to see their hard, hard work reflected in investment. I congratulate them, and I wish them many, many years of continued success supporting and strengthening and inspiring children across our communities.

Speaker, that's a good-news story, but I don't have too many more. As I said, it's a budget of missed opportunity, and I think that this budget really does rob people of the hope they had. Imagine what could be reflected of their needs in this budget. If—when—the NDP forms government at our next opportunity, we would ensure that our priorities were reflected in the spending and the plans as a government, but today it's going to have to be enough to tell the government what we would have done. Some of the members on the other side will come back after the next election; some of them won't, but they can watch from home how we invest in the communities.

In this case, we would have invested in long-term care, hiring 10,000 PSWs this year and giving them a raise. Speaker, it's not enough to call folks heroes. It's not enough to thank them. You do have to invest in their health and wellness. You have to start to see this essential work that we talk so much about—and it has been brought to the fore really clearly during the pandemic. We all know now how vital many of these roles are across the community, how they keep us moving forward. When it comes to

personal support workers, whether that's in long-term care, congregate care—all through our community, we have personal support workers.

Just this morning, my colleague from Sudbury had his private member's bill vote. I was proud to vote for it. It was Bill 266, and it was respecting wage minimums for support workers. I wonder if any of the government members were proud to vote for it. How did it turn out, folks? No? That's what I thought. It did not pass.

So we can call them heroes, but we won't pay them to be heroes. That's actually an awful part of this. It isn't just not respecting the work of the personal support workers; we should have been hiring them.

When other jurisdictions were prioritizing health and safety so that we could get through this pandemic—not this government. They had other plans. They have the “just trust us” plan—and I don't tend to; I'm not a trusting sort. The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. We haven't seen that there has been a strategy that has kept people safe and well.

Some of the things that are missing—we wanted that comprehensive investment and plan for vaccines. I stood up this morning and asked a question specific to Durham region, but I've been hearing it echoed across communities with my colleagues. Everyone wants to ensure that their community members have access to vaccines, and that's going to require investment all the way along. Mobile vaccines: What could that look like for folks? I realize that this has been a piecemeal, convoluted rollout, but it didn't need to be. We have been anticipating the vaccines for a long time. I have heard the government's answer about the supply challenges, but we need to make sure the distribution of it is seamless, and again, we haven't seen that.

I'd like to talk a little bit about education and child care. We've talked about the she-cession and that we're going to need a she-covey. Often, when we speak about women in the workforce, we also have that connected conversation around child care. This government is going to have to pull up its socks and really invest to ensure that women are part of that she-covey. Again, it has been not enough. That's sort of the theme of this budget. If not now, when? We are in a pandemic that keeps going and keeps going. We all know that there will come a time when this is something we remember, but we're not there yet, so we should be seeing investment and support now.

We aren't seeing the commitment to replenish school board reserves. This is a government that said “Thou shalt spend the money you have in reserve” to the boards, but they need that money to build, to support learning needs going forward, and there is no money in this budget to replenish those supplies. The “Keeping Schools Safe” section in the budget just recaps this year's spending, including federal dollars and board reserve funds, but there isn't new money for, for example, ventilation systems. There's certainly no mention of increased staffing to reduce class sizes. If we're not seeing the funding for COVID-19, if we're not seeing that at least remain stable or increase, where does that leave us? I know that there are—I think it's four schools in Durham, four schools in

Oshawa, one for sure that is awfully personal to me, and that's Glen Street Public School. That was where I was teaching when I had to stop and run in an election. Those are my kids. That's my neighbourhood. To know that public health closed them for at least two weeks because of rampant COVID-19 in the school—really, it has been a challenging situation leading up to that decision. I'd like to see schools like that get the support they need.

Jobs and business support: It's going to take me a minute to find it, but I got a letter—I think it was today. I walked in here and I got up so quickly because I was so excited to speak about the budget. Darn it, I can't get my hands on it. I got a letter from the IPS action centre. That's the independent parts supplier action centre—which was actually the very last public event that I went to before the pandemic realities really set in. We cut a ribbon. I was there with some of the administrators for the IPS action centre. In the wake of GM's original decision, this was set up to help those workers find their next steps and move forward in an uncertain future and to try to give them the tools they needed to connect them—résumé support, job support. I got a letter from them, from Unifor Local 222 and voices in the community sounding the alarm. I was copied on it, but it was sent to this provincial government as well as the federal government, asking for supports, asking for commitment from both levels of government to stand by them, as GM is staying in our community—or we've got a future with GM in Oshawa, which is great. Their concern, as the part suppliers, is—they want those assurances that the jobs will stay in the community. While that isn't something that is in the budget, I want to see that kind of economic support, the job supports, for communities. We have an opportunity in Oshawa to keep those jobs there, to apply that pressure, in this case, to General Motors, to remind them that we're all interconnected in our community and we need that kind of support. So again, this is a focused strategy that we're needing from the government in Oshawa.

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A few things that are missing that would also help people when it comes to the workforce and a strong economic future, that we don't see in this bill, disappointingly—because we've been talking about it a lot—is the need for paid sick days. The government likes to point to a federal program that is not a provincial paid sick day program. People have been calling for it because it's what is needed. It's not just the NDP pulling words out of the sky; it has been asked for by workers.

We would like to see paid vaccination time, as well. If workers are having to make difficult and impossible choices right now, if they are sick or have been told to stay home to self-isolate and they know that those days off work are unpaid, if they know that they will not be able to pay their rent, if those couple of days that they have to stay home mean that they can't pay their rent and that they then might get evicted—those are tough choices. Why on earth would anybody—they can't make that choice, so they're likely to go to work sick. We've seen what community spread looks like; we're seeing it now. We're seeing the

numbers rise. Vaccination time matters, too, as we get into the next chapter of this and more people are looking for that opportunity to get vaccinated. Money is involved, and we were hoping to see that from this government.

Speaker, I'd like to speak a bit about the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. Unfortunately, we haven't seen expanded eligibility in this budget for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant. The eligibility hasn't changed, so some businesses that applied and weren't successful in getting this grant—dry cleaners or breweries etc.—if they didn't qualify the first time around, too bad, so sad; there will be no additional funding. We're hearing all sorts of interesting things. I have a gentleman in my riding who has two businesses, and he was told that he would have to pick one. Imagine picking one of your businesses to receive a significant grant and be able to continue, and having to pick one that is now going to flounder and potentially no longer exist. How do you pick among your two businesses? Because he's being told he can choose whichever of the two, that would tell me that they would both indeed qualify, so had he been two people, both of those businesses would have been successful and would have received this funding. How is that fair? And there's no appeal process.

There are a lot of other complicated stories that we're hearing across our ridings. We've all got businesses that either just missed out based on some technicality—or like this gentleman I just talked about, who has two businesses and has to pick a favourite. That's unbelievable.

I also heard from Sarah. Sarah is a hairdresser, and again, she has been playing this game with them since January 19. She applied for the small business grant on January 19. Something about the formal name or what have you in the paperwork meant that there was a challenge to actually receiving the payment. She is qualified. Well, the money has not come—and I don't mean to laugh; it's just remarkable that there are so many businesses right now that have been told they will receive the money, that they have been successful in their grant applications, and that still haven't gotten any of it. People are wondering if the money has been deposited in the wrong account.

I spoke to Kandi from a salon called Hair Kandi. She has been waiting. She is a successful applicant, and she's very grateful for that—but now, where's the money? The wolves are knocking. She has a lot of creditors saying, "You've told us the money is coming. When?" And she can't answer them. She has been working with our office. When we reach out to the ministry, we're told, "Send them to this email." Well, that's the one they've already emailed.

Our office is in that same loop of trying to get a call back or trying to support people. Being an MPP, it used to be that you could pick up the phone and somebody would answer your questions, but, ministry to ministry, it depends now. The Premier did away with the land lines and was so excited about that, but what that means is that none of your ministries have to return our calls, because we can't call, and often, we don't have the exact person, which is its own challenge.

I've mentioned those businesses—we're starting to keep track of them, though, so we're happy to share that with the government on the other side.

When it comes to social assistance and income support, we haven't seen what people need, which is disappointing. Speaker, I don't have to tell you that in this budget, there was no mention of poverty. If there's no mention of it, then there isn't a solution.

Certainly, in Oshawa, we are struggling and in desperate need of anti-poverty initiatives, anti-homelessness investment. The homeless community is really struggling.

We want more strength and purpose from the other side when it comes to addictions and opioid strategies.

There is no mention of any support for children with autism. My colleague from Windsor West got up this morning and asked an excellent, very specific question about folks and families in congregate care and their needs. We shouldn't have to ask; it should be in this budget. You're supposed to be working with the same constituents that we are, answering the phone and their emails and addressing their concerns.

Transit, transportation infrastructure: I feel like I've had the opportunity to speak a lot about that. I'm disappointed that I didn't see the GO train to Bowmanville in this particular budget, but hopefully, the wheels are still turning in that direction. It's always nice, though, when we see it in writing. Hopefully, that is coming.

You can see I've got pages and pages in front of me. I know the government has buckets of emails and concerns from their own constituents. While you missed the boat in the budget for some of them, hopefully, it's not too late, and you will indeed start the kind of investment that has to happen.

We want a budget that will give people help, that will give people hope. We're going to keep fighting against their cuts and have a positive vision. We hope the government will share it with us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I thank the member for Oshawa for her presentation.

Speaker, you will know that in the Ontario budget, we increased the budget of the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

More recently, I spoke about the investment of \$4.5 million to the Abilities Centre and added on to—overall, that's a global investment of \$6 million.

My question to the member from Oshawa: Will she be supporting this unprecedented investment in helping Durham residents of all abilities?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to have a bit of a chance to do a back-and-forth with the member from Whitby because I know—and he will know—that we have stood alongside the folks at Grandview Children's Centre as I congratulated them for their hard work through the years. The last government and this government are recognizing the needs there.

The Abilities Centre in Whitby is a very special heart of the Durham community.

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Again, these are community centres and spaces that deserve to be funded, that do tremendous work across communities with families. We want to make sure, though—while parents are appreciating that services may be able to continue in one regard, they also are parents of children with special needs who are looking for other services and supports that they aren't finding elsewhere in this budget.

The big ribbon-cutting moment is one thing—but it's all of the other small pieces, too.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? The member from—

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: I'm not going to help you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): —Mushkegowuk–James Bay.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Merci pour ton allocution. In your speech about Bill 269, you spoke about poverty. That's something that touches us all in all of Ontario. In Mushkegowuk, we spoke about the lack of homes—a home is built for six, and there are two or three generations living in this small home. We also heard, just this week, from our colleague from Spadina–Fort York with a motion on homelessness.

I'd like to hear your perspective: What do you think should be in this budget bill to cover homelessness and poverty?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: While the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay can't see my two desks here covered in letters, there's one of them here, from Cassandra—and I look forward to sharing it later in today's debate—that is exactly what you talked about, the challenges of not only finding a home but keeping the one she's got in the middle of evictions and dealing with poverty.

So many people have a story. When you walk around Oshawa and you see the homeless circumstances, it's gut-wrenching—in my riding and in your riding.

We need an increase—we've been saying this since long before the pandemic, folks—in ODSP and OW supports for people. The government has their pat tag lines that they like to say—but these are people's lives. They need money they can count on. They need compassion to go with compensation and money, to get by and make plans and participate in their communities, where they do indeed belong, despite this government's—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for her speech.

One of the concerns that I hear regularly and heard loud and clear during the last election campaign in Milton was about the issue of broadband. It's a serious issue, especially for my constituents who live in the rural part of Milton. Milton is part of the GTA, as we all know. Can you believe that even in ridings like Milton that are literally part of the GTA, there isn't broadband Internet service available for constituents, for farmers, for small business owners? It's especially highlighted by this

pandemic. There are students who are obviously having a hard time trying to go online, trying to study—farmers, small businesses, so forth.

Our government has previously made a \$1-billion historic investment, and in this budget, there's an additional \$3 billion to address gaps when it comes to Internet service throughout this province.

I'm wondering if the member can tell us if the member thinks that is a good investment for Ontarians' broadband service.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am so excited every time I get the chance to stand up and talk about Bill 257, and I bet I'm going to have the chance later this afternoon—or tomorrow; who knows? But I'm ready.

I have spent the last few days in committee with Bill 257, which is the so-called broadband bill. I say "so-called" because schedules 1 and 2, which we proudly supported at committee, deal with the expansion of broadband, which is needed—no question. Schedule 3 of that bill, though—the government wants to celebrate that investment, but then throws in schedule 3 that gives phenomenal cosmic powers to one minister to be able to supercharge their MZOs to do damage and harm and make a mess of things. Again, this government—with the one hand, they're talking about broadband, and with the other, they're beating down the future of the province.

It's a tough one, to answer that clearly—yet the clear answer is, we support broadband. We need communities all across—we need the unserved, underserved, last-mile communities to be a priority.

I don't know why the government wouldn't accept that amendment and prioritize in writing those communities that are—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further questions?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member from Oshawa for her very well-researched statements.

My question is related to what the member mentioned about her riding in Oshawa and the amount of vaccines that were allocated.

Over the past months and months, one of the things I have been talking about is the allocation of vaccines to Scarborough, in my riding of Scarborough Southwest, which hasn't been enough. Today, we found out there are over 700,000 vaccines that are sitting in the freezers. Meanwhile, our allocation went down by about 77%.

I want to ask the member to reflect on that and talk about how it has been for her riding, and what the government could have done to ensure that there is a better, equitable distribution of vaccines.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I also took the opportunity today, during question period, to ask the minister about vaccines.

In Durham region—it's a dubious honour being at the top of the list for the number of cases per capita in the province. We're number five now. My office is being flooded with concerns about how to access the vaccine—what that can look like for different people who have children with chronic illnesses. Parents are wondering if

they are allowed to get vaccinated to keep their kids safe. Everyone has a specific question. Part of it has been a challenge because this has been such a tangled rollout. I applaud our local public health and the hospital, which are working to get the vaccines into arms—but it has been a piecemeal system. The government should have invested in it all the way along and been ready for it, for crying out loud.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I was listening intently to the member—and I have to say, I have great respect for the member. However, listening to her, I had to wonder whether we are reading the same budget document—because our budget gives people hope, and it includes unprecedented investments, such as \$5.1 billion for our hospitals, \$2.6 billion to construct long-term-care beds, \$14 billion in capital grants for schools, and \$2.8 billion to build broadband.

The member spoke about PSWs. We know that long-term care has been top of mind for our government and, frankly, for everyone in this province that we call home.

My question is simple: Does the member support this budget and spending \$125 million to support the accelerated training of close to 9,000 PSWs, including in her region, at Durham College? Yes or no?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: In answer to her original question—if we're reading the same document, I think we're reading it differently. I'm reading for what's there and what isn't there.

When we hear from our community members about long-term care, to the member's point, and we hear from our community members about education, to the member's point, the dollars that the government is investing—well, obviously, you couldn't get away with investing nothing in education or investing nothing in health care. But when the numbers don't keep up with inflation, when those investments don't meet the needs of what the hospitals are asking for, how do you see that as a celebratory announcement?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

2021 ONTARIO BUDGET BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2021

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 31, 2021, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): When the debate ended this morning, the member from Milton had the floor. He has some time remaining, and then there will

be time for questions and responses. Therefore, the member from Milton has the floor to continue debate.

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Mr. Parm Gill: It's a pleasure once again to rise and speak to the motion and continue my debate from this morning. Let me just pick up where we left off.

As I was saying, we continue to invest in people through our \$1.9 billion to increase staff levels and allow them to provide a minimum of four hours of care for our seniors. This is a minimum now. Our Minister of Finance said it right: This is the gold standard now, anywhere in the country.

Mr. Speaker, that's not all. We are investing \$61.4 million for minor capital repairs and \$60.9 million to help with testing, sanitizing and PPE costs.

And we are well on our way in creating 30,000 new long-term-care beds. This is an investment of \$2.69 billion—but that's not just a dollar amount; it's peace of mind for families who have been struggling to find safe and comfortable places for their loved ones to live. Loved ones in Milton will soon have 600 new spaces to live in Milton. It's investments like our \$2.69 billion that will help make these beds a reality.

But we aren't just creating new beds. We have continued to invest in our existing long-term-care homes, right now in my riding of Milton. We're investing to keep our loved ones safe with containment funding for Allendale worth \$1,597,000, and for Mount Nemo Christian Nursing Home in the amount of \$416,700. That's a total of over \$2 million.

We continued this investment with money for protection for retirement homes. In Milton, I was proud to see \$43,700 go to Birkdale, \$35,800 to Martindale and \$56,100 to Seasons. That's a total of \$756,400.

We are taking real action to support our seniors in long-term-care homes and retirement homes in Milton and right across this great province.

Our front-line nurses and support workers are real heroes, Mr. Speaker. This past year, they have demonstrated how strong, resilient and committed they are to the people they work with. That's why it's important for the government to be there to support them with investments like the High Wage Transition Fund of \$2.8 million, a temporary wage enhancement fund of \$239 million, and \$52.5 million to recruit and retain health care workers and caregivers. These are the kinds of supports that will ensure our front-line heroes remain able to provide the care we all count on.

But we're going further. Our government has committed to train up to 8,200 new personal support workers, an investment worth \$115 million. That's 8,200 new support workers who will ensure our loved ones are looked after.

If you total all of our new investments to retain and support PSWs, it's over \$413 million.

As I have said before, this past year really demonstrated who we are and who the true heroes in our community are. But without a doubt, those working in our health care system have been a hero's hero. I have heard many

heartfelt stories about the caring men and women who have gone above and beyond in our hospitals, who have provided a level of health care that can't be matched anywhere in the world. They need our support, and with this budget we are committing to adding 800 more nurses right across this province. That's an investment of nearly \$8 million.

Our nurses have been working to support our families, and I'm proud to be part of a government that supports our nurses too.

We are adding 500 critical care beds. That's an investment worth \$125 million.

We are investing an additional \$1.2 billion to help recover from financial pressures in our hospitals.

We are investing \$1 billion to provide vaccinations for those who want them right across this province.

I'm proud to see this translate into real results for those living in my riding of Milton.

We have committed to 52 new hospital beds in Halton region and 12 new beds for Milton, an investment worth over \$6 million. That's in addition to the \$854,000 in the 2020-21 Health Infrastructure Renewal Fund and the new operational funding of \$5.2 million. That's \$12.5 million more for health care in Halton region—more for Milton, more for Halton, more for Ontario.

Right across this province, our government is investing a record \$69.8 billion into health care. This is unprecedented, and under the leadership of Premier Ford, these kinds of investments will continue for the people right across this province.

The theme of this budget is "Protecting People's Health and Our Economy"—and we heard that loud and clear during the consultation. Everything that's in the budget is directly coming out of the consultation leading up to the budget.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I know I'm out of time, so thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Milton for his presentation.

One of the things that has really bothered me about this budget is the lack of support for not-for-profits. As our finance critic mentioned this morning, that was the perfect opportunity to reach directly into communities and support them.

I was out delivering meals with Meals on Wheels last week in Niagara. They haven't had a budget increase for 10 years. These are people on the front lines delivering meals to seniors.

Not-for-profits all over Ontario could have really used help from this government to get them through a very difficult time, and they didn't get it.

Does the member feel this is a missed opportunity in this budget? And why were not-for-profits not included, as they are on the front lines of this pandemic?

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank the member opposite for that important question.

All I can tell the member opposite is that I'm proud of the record our government has when it comes to not just

supporting families, small business owners and farmers, but also not-for-profits and the wonderful work that these organizations do within our communities, right across this province—also, the involvement that comes from members of the community. That's what makes communities like mine, Milton, great. If you noticed, even during the pandemic, there are a number of organizations that have cropped up just to support their neighbours, members of their communities, those who need it, in terms of seriousness—picking up medications, delivering food, and on and on. I don't think we can ever do enough for these organizations, for these individuals in our communities.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I want to thank the member from Milton for his comments.

I listened very intently, and he did make a lot of comments about the important investments that this government has made throughout the pandemic in Milton and in Halton.

I want to ask the member if he could comment on what those investments mean for the people in his riding and how the investments made by the government—whether it's in health care or in supporting businesses or the tourism sector—are helping constituents in Milton.

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank my colleague from Eglinton–Lawrence for that wonderful question. It allows me the opportunity to share.

This budget has been very well received by constituents. I can share with all members of this House some of the measures introduced. Of course, first and foremost, the concern at the top of everybody's mind is health care. We've made record investments to help the economy, small business, families, students—you name it.

The number one investment that I am really proud of—and I know I have spoken over and over on this issue, Mr. Speaker—is broadband. I have many, many constituents in the rural part of my riding who have been struggling for far too long. Our record investment of \$4 billion into broadband is really going to help not just my constituents in Milton but many across this province. Everyone deserves to have access to the Internet, especially in this day and age. It's important for students, families, farmers and business. So I want to thank the Minister of Finance for that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Gurratan Singh: There has been a lot of discussion with the debate, particularly in Brampton. Last week, we saw the Conservative government make an empty promise about building another hospital in Brampton, despite the fact that there was no money and no timeline allocated for another hospital in the budget. When the Premier was called out for it, he actually came to Brampton and doubled down and said that there's no money in the budget this year, and that they might make a hospital—or additional work on Peel Memorial—in 2023.

My question to the member is, why is the Conservative government leaving Brampton behind once again, and why aren't they making investments this year, in 2021, to help fight Brampton's health care crisis?

Mr. Parm Gill: I'm really glad the member opposite, the member from Brampton East, asked me that question.

As everyone knows, I was honoured to represent one of the Brampton ridings, Brampton–Springdale, federally as a member of Parliament. So I'm very familiar with the issue.

What I would tell the member opposite is, even if you look at the current Brampton Civic Hospital—that was courtesy of the previous Conservative government. I know the Liberal government was there for a decade and a half and they kept on promising a new hospital. Peel Memorial—they turned that into sort of a day-surgery facility.

The Premier has announced a new hospital for Brampton. We are committed. I know Bramptonians—and I've received many calls from my friends from Brampton. They are very happy. As the Premier likes to say, when we make a commitment, we will deliver on it. We are going to deliver for Bramptonians, with that new hospital. Mark my words.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague the MPP from Milton.

He was passionately talking this morning. I was listening to him very carefully. His presentation this morning was talking about the lack of schools in the Milton riding—and not only the Milton riding, but Halton region. He was so excited about this budget giving hope and aspiration to the younger children, the next generation of Ontario. I ask the member to elaborate on that. This is a good-news story, through this budget.

Mr. Parm Gill: I want to thank my colleague for that important question.

I really enjoy talking about all of the investments in Milton. I am proud of those, and I'm proud to be part of this government that is really taking care of not only Ontarians but—for me, for selfish reasons—my constituents.

As the member mentioned, there have been six new schools since June 2018. That's a record. Milton was ignored, was left out by the previous Liberal government. We have announced six new schools, and I just had a groundbreaking ceremony this past Friday for another school with the Minister of Education, our mayor, our councillors, the board, trustees and the director of education. It was wonderful. We're doing that regularly. I'm now averaging, give or take, about three months—new schools, new schools, new schools.

That does not include the expansion of Bishop Reding—that's another \$20 million. What we were seeing, under the previous Liberal government, was portables being added on to virtually every school in Milton. At Bishop Reding, we had over 60 portables. That's not the

case any more. The new extension is being constructed, and students are going to be housed in the school.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je remercie le député de Milton pour son discours. Mais, écoutez, en 2018, vous avez fait des promesses de ramener le Northlander, comme nous, on avait fait. En 2019, j'ai demandé au député de Nipissing si—puis il était choqué que je posais une question sur le Northlander.

Monsieur le Président, on est rendu en 2021. Plus de trois ans ont passé. Ma question est simple : combien de consultations est-ce que ça prend? Combien de « surveys »? On sait qu'il y a eu un train une couple de semaines passées qui est passé sur les tracks pour voir comment était la condition des tracks, puis on attend toujours. On a vu dans ce budget encore des milliards alloués pour encore des « surveys » ou des études. Après trois ans, il me semble que ça fait assez longtemps qu'on attend. Je vous demande la question : quand est-ce qu'on va ravoire notre Northlander?

Mr. Parm Gill: Of course, we've been consulting.

The member pointed out 2018. In 2018, we shared our platform with Ontarians. I am proud to say that we received a strong mandate to govern this province after the neglect and mismanagement by the previous Liberal government—obviously, supported by the NDP. At the time, they had absolutely no issues.

We're tackling one issue at a time, especially now. Look at what we're doing currently with COVID-19. When it comes to the success we've had over the last year or so, we are truly a role model when it comes to other territories, other jurisdictions. So we are working hard. That's the commitment that we made in the last election, and we will not waver from that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There is no further time for questions and responses.

Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents to speak to the budget motion.

I want to start off by specifically addressing this to the member for Milton. The member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay asked a very specific question about the Northlander. We often note that the regions in the north are left out when it comes to funding decisions—when it comes to transportation, when it comes to health care, when it comes to the education sector, when it comes to mental health and addictions support. When the member from Mushkegowuk–James Bay brought up the Northlander and was asking for a response to that, the member from Milton stood up and talked about how he and the rest of the Conservative government are role models for people in this province, but he did not address the very issue that the member for Mushkegowuk–James Bay brought up. I'm not sure how you're a role model when you don't even attempt to respond to a question. You can't even repeat one word that was in the question, which was “Northlander.”

Speaker, I'm not sure that they are really—they may be role models, but they certainly aren't good ones.

To this budget motion before us that we're debating now: In the previous debate that just ended about 15 or 20 minutes ago, the member for Mississauga Centre asked my colleague from Oshawa about supporting residents in long-term care and supporting the workers, specifically, in long-term care—the PSWs and the nurses; frankly, the member from Mississauga Centre's nursing colleagues. She talked about some money that they're putting into long-term care. She didn't talk about the fact that a good chunk of any funding that this government has put forward into long-term care has gone directly into the pockets of shareholders of the privately run, for-profit corporations, many of which have board members who are either Conservative Premiers or Conservative supporters.

1400

She neglected to mention the fact that there is nothing in this bill to have permanent wage increases for PSWs. In fact, as the member for Mississauga Centre gets up and talks about how PSWs are our front-line heroes and “do we not support them based on what they've put in this budget”—just this morning, my colleague from Sudbury brought forward a bill, Bill 266, which directly speaks to the wages and the compensation for PSWs. We know that the majority of PSWs are women. They're low-wage workers. They do not have stable hours. Most of them are part-time so that these private, for-profit corporations don't have to pay them benefits, so that these corporations can keep more money and pay out more to their shareholders. This morning, when my colleague took his bill on permanently increasing support workers' pay—the government side voted against it. I said it this morning, actually, and I'm going to repeat it now: How do you stand in this House and say that they are front-line heroes and that you are supporting them and that you value them, and then vote against a bill that would recognize and address the precarious work of PSWs, the low wages for PSWs, the lack of full-time jobs for PSWs? I said to my colleagues on this side of the House, and I'll put it on the record—when I heard that happen, I said, “I think if you look in the dictionary under ‘cognitive dissonance,’ you would see pictures of every single one of the members on the Conservative side.”

As my colleague from Waterloo said on Monday afternoon in debate, the Premier and this government are a “walking contradiction.” I made a note of that when I heard her say it, because it's an accurate description.

Speaker, one thing I know that this government is going to do, and I'm going to share this with the people in the province—more specifically, my riding, because we see this. It has happened in past budgets, and it happened the day that this government tabled their budget. They will start the narrative of: “We have put something for this particular member in opposition in the budget. We've given to the community for this opposition member for this particular project. And if they don't support the budget with all the bad stuff in it, then clearly they don't support that particular project in their community.” It's happening

to all of the members on this side of the House, that the government is pushing this narrative—but I'm going to speak specifically to the hospital project in my region, for the new regional hospital and—so Windsor Regional, but also for Windsor's Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare, for the mental health in-patient bed expansion and renovations. They've already started a narrative of: "The only way to get this done is to elect a Conservative." The Premier was on our radio, after announcing the funding in the budget, saying, "You really need to elect a Conservative to make this happen."

Speaker, there's a lot of bad stuff for my riding in this budget, and that narrative—first of all, I want to point out that, for years, politicians of all stripes in my community, the CEOs of the two hospitals that are going to see some investment, and community members across my entire riding, across the entire city, across the entire region, have all worked in a non-partisan way to push this project forward. In fact, we have been applauded for the fact that we managed to keep this a non-partisan issue, that we recognized that we all had to work together regardless of political stripe, regardless of any differences we may have on other issues, in order to push this together. We are a united community, when it comes to this project, so it's very disappointing for me and my community to hear the Premier and other members of this government push the narrative that the only way to get this done is to support and vote for Conservatives. It's insulting to the people who have worked for years on this, but it's also a really, really dangerous message when it comes to our democracy.

So I'm going to ask the government members today to consider what I said and what this means to the community and how well we have all worked together, going forward, when they're going to be talking about our hospital project.

I talked about, you don't vote—like I said, that will be the narrative, too. This government wants people to believe that you vote on one issue in a budget, and that just is not reality. That's not the way it works. That's a myth, in fact.

For my community, when you look through this budget, I don't see a dime—not a dime, not a cent, to directly support the casino workers in my riding who have been out of work through this entire pandemic.

There really is nothing in this budget for those front-line health care heroes this government talks about.

There's nearly \$800 million in cuts to education, continuing this government's drive to eliminate tens of thousands of jobs in the education sector—and in my community, that's a lot of education workers who will lose their jobs in the middle of a pandemic. I know, in some regions, pink slips have already started to be handed out to the education workers. That directly adversely affects students in our public education system.

In a time when this government should be investing in smaller class sizes—they should have been before, but specifically in a pandemic, when all of the experts are telling them that's what needs to happen, they need to

invest in smaller class sizes, which would mean more education workers on the job. Smaller class sizes—to allow for physical distancing, to keep everyone safely apart, especially now, with variants—is what the experts are telling this government needs to happen. They've been telling them that since the beginning of this pandemic. And the government's response is to cut nearly \$800 million from public education and start laying off education workers. It makes absolutely no sense. Not only does it not make sense, it is dangerous. You are putting people's lives at risk.

Speaker, I talked about the casino workers.

I've also heard from many, many businesses in my riding. This government talks about their grant program for small businesses. There are many small businesses in my community that didn't qualify the first time around and that still don't qualify this time around. There is no direct support for those businesses. They're struggling to keep their businesses afloat. This government has decided to give gifts to large corporations like Costco and Walmart—their friends—while pushing our small mom-and-pop businesses, our Main Streets, the lifeblood of our communities, out of business.

1410

I have a quote from one of the local small businesses. Once everything is open again and people can safely start to travel and go to other communities and gather together, this is an organization, a club, that I highly recommend. I'm a little biased, considering that I have family who are Polish, so I have an affinity for Polish food; however, I do highly recommend this particular group—and any other group and any other restaurant, frankly, in my riding. Polish Club Windsor—this is a quote from them that they emailed to us: "Our organization has been around for over 95 years and we have a long list of accomplishments but this situation is extremely bleak at this time. We are forgotten casualties of the pandemic." The Polish club has been at risk to close since the beginning of the pandemic. They've tried to open a drive-through to serve perogies and cabbage rolls, but that is not nearly enough to cover their bills. This organization does so much more than sell perogies and cabbage rolls.

We are at risk of losing cultural associations that have been around for almost a century. This is the legacy of this government. There was nothing for the Polish club in this budget or for many other main street small businesses in my community.

We've had several businesses contact my office for help with their application for the government's program after being denied. We contacted the ministry—so this goes to working with the other side. We hear the Conservative side say this all the time: "Just work with us. Why won't you work with us?" Well, we've contacted the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade several times over the course of many, many months, and they have yet to return any correspondence. It's not just me contacting them; my colleague from Windsor-Tecumseh and my colleague from Essex are contacting them too. More importantly, these businesses

are contacting the government members directly. They're not getting a response, and then they come to our offices for help, and we try to help them. They're getting denied for the government program, and so we forward their correspondence to the government members, to that minister specifically, with a cover letter saying, "This is a constituent who needs your help. They need some clarification. Please respond to them"—and it's silence; it's crickets. There is nothing in this budget to help those individuals.

Speaker, in my riding specifically, one in four women and children live in poverty. It's a pretty stark number. Yet there is no increase to support people with disabilities, to support people living in poverty. There is no increase to the Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works. In fact, the opposite is happening: This government is moving rapidly to privatize that system, to take money out of the system. That doesn't help the people those two particular programs are meant to serve. When we are in the midst of a pandemic, in a third wave that is worse than anything we have experienced yet, there is no funding in this budget for those individuals to be able to buy PPE, to be able to buy the products they need to clean and disinfect their homes, to keep them safe.

There's no extra money for housing. Think about this, Speaker: A single individual on ODSP will have a maximum income of \$1,169 a month. My area is well known for our housing costs that are much lower, although they have gone up exponentially. Compared to other regions, our housing is considered affordable. Well, it's not affordable for the people who actually live in the city and have been there for a long time; it's affordable for the people coming from the GTHA or coming from Ottawa, in comparison. The cost of rent has increased rapidly. The number of people who are being evicted during this pandemic has increased rapidly, largely in part due to the fact that the government did nothing to protect them and maintain that protection when it comes to eviction.

So, on \$1,169 a month, and for someone on Ontario Works, it's about \$733—I would challenge anyone in this chamber to tell me where someone is supposed to get safe, stable, appropriate, accessible housing in this entire province for \$733 a month or \$1,169 a month and still be able to put food on the table, still be able to take public transit to go get groceries. In this case, the vast majority of them are having to go to food banks because they don't have enough. For those who have medications that they need to take that aren't covered under the program, they now are deciding, "Am I going to pay my rent, am I going to get food, or am I going to take my medication? What is it going to be?"

I've pointed it out time and time again—if I've said it once, I've said it a million times—when you invest in people on the front end, not only is it the morally correct thing to do, to give these people a hand up, but it's a savings on the back end. When you're not ensuring that they have safe, stable, accessible housing, their health suffers; there is an increased cost. When they can't have access to nutritious food, they end up in our hospitals more

often, they go to the doctor more often, the education system picks up the slack feeding the kids from low-income households. And there's a cost to the justice system, because, oftentimes, these individuals are disproportionately represented in our justice system. I could go on. There's a lot more in here—or I should say, there's a lot more that isn't in here that should be in here.

The member from Mississauga Centre, in her question to my colleague from Oshawa, said, "Do we not support a budget—it's a budget of hope." In the opinion of my constituents, based on the numbers and the facts within this budget, it is a budget of false hope.

What the government really needs to do is to put their money where their mouth is and truly invest in the people in the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's time for questions.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I have a very simple question.

I appreciate the honourable member's speech, and I accept the fact that she will be voting against the budget because there's more in it that she dislikes than that she likes. I accept that, and I would expect that, given that it is a Conservative Party and she's a member of the opposition party.

Having said that, I wonder if she could just highlight for me—if they could be separated out and voted on individually—what the items are within the budget that the member likes.

I understand and appreciate that, overall, you are against the budget because there's too much that you don't like, but are there elements within it that you could support if they were separated out—just so we have a better understanding of the types of things that you're looking for in a budget.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I just want to point out that the government House leader did exactly what I had asked the government not to do at the very beginning of my speech. It's not that I don't support this budget because it's a Conservative budget. I wish the government House leader had listened to what I had said.

The fact of the matter is, I can't support a budget that doesn't support the one in four women and children in my riding who are living in poverty. There's nothing in this budget for them. There's nothing for all the small businesses that I talked about. There's nothing for the casino workers, who have been out of work for well over a year, yet this government hasn't invested in them. There is nothing in here for those PSWs, those front-line heroes who deserve a wage increase—in fact, this government voted against one of our bills today that would do just that.

So this is not about, "It's a Conservative budget, so I'm just going to oppose it"; it's that it's not a good budget. There needs to be more.

1420

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my colleague from Windsor West for a very thoughtful presentation.

I'm going to ask her the same question I asked the member for Milton. I have a feeling I'm going to like this answer a little bit more.

She talked a lot about supports in her community. She mentioned a cultural organization, the Polish association.

I was talking earlier about not-for-profits.

What kind of opportunities did the government have to support not-for-profits in this budget, given that they are really the front line in this pandemic—so many organizations, from cultural institutions to other charities like Meals on Wheels? What kind of opportunities could the government have taken advantage of in this budget?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to thank the member for Niagara Centre for that question.

There were lots of missed opportunities in this budget when it comes to not-for-profits, when it comes to our local small businesses—the heart of our community—and when it comes to the front-line workers.

Specifically to the member's question: When you talk about not-for-profits—these are the organizations within our community that step up when nobody else will or when nobody else can. The very least the government could have done in this budget is to support them. When I talk about individuals in my riding having to go to the food bank—and food bank use has gone up; I wouldn't doubt it's gone up in every riding across this province—it is those organizations that step up and do that. It's those organizations that step up and fill the gaps when it comes to trying to find people housing or putting clothes on their backs—lots of missed opportunities.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I didn't mean to insult or impugn motive on the member opposite.

I am very sincerely wanting to find out what elements of the budget, if they could be separated, does the member support—even if it means that there would need to be additional funding to it? I ask this for a specific reason—because I think she spoke very eloquently to the fact that, overall, this was a budget she couldn't support. I understand and appreciate that, but I want to really drill down. What elements are there in the budget that she could support if they were taken out of the budget and voted on separately, even if it means that in her opinion there needs to be an increase in funding, for example?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I would say that just about everything in this bill, if the government actually invested more, if they were keeping up with—at the very least—inflation, that would be something that all of us on this side of the House could support.

That is not a simple answer, as simple as the government House leader is trying to make it—because I'm sure that somewhere in there, there's a clip he's after.

The reality is, you have to address all of these areas. We are in a pandemic. This is a pandemic budget, a budget of hope, yet there is very, very little hope in this budget when it comes to the people in my riding.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate the opportunity to rise.

I'm going to talk a little bit about casinos—because in Niagara, as we know, we've been hit extremely hard with job loss. I'm going to talk to that a bit when I get an opportunity to speak. We have two casinos that employ 4,200 workers. They've been laid off now for over a year.

In Windsor—and I don't have their numbers, I apologize, but I know they're around 2,000—they've been laid off for over a year. I know their unions have been trying to find a way that they could open over the last year.

The Woodbine casino and racetrack were shut down in December—the racetrack part of it, and the racing was stopped. Again, there were jobs there.

When I read the budget, I didn't see anything in the budget talking about how we can support those workers at the casino.

My question is pretty simple. Why do you think that this government, in this budget, did nothing for the workers in the casino and, quite frankly, the horse racing industry?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: To respond to the member for Niagara Falls: I have no clue why they are not considering all of the workers in this province when it comes to a budget during a pandemic. In fact, it's truly unfortunate—and “unfortunate” is putting it lightly. I have another word, but it would be unparliamentary.

The fact that we know that our casinos are economic drivers, that our casinos specifically—the amount of money that goes back into our municipality directly, but then also into the local businesses around, many of which are being forced to close permanently because this government is not providing any support. Also, the casino workers spend their wages in our communities. In Windsor, they spend them in our community. In Niagara, they spend them in their community. Across this province, they are part of the economic engine of our communities.

To the member from Niagara Falls: I'm not sure why the government would not have even considered providing support directly to these workers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I was somewhat disappointed not to get an answer to the question when I asked very sincerely on two separate occasions.

I wonder, then, given the member's response, if she could just help me understand, because I think it's an important point as we craft future budgets, why, in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, when minority Liberal governments introduced budgets that cut health care, did not invest in long-term care, did not increase funding to the rate of inflation, made no progress on the signature piece of the NDP, which framed their coalition with them, mainly, decreasing auto insurance rates—why, at that time, were the NDP supportive and able to vote either in favour of the budget or to abstain, but in this instance, when there is a budget that includes a brand new hospital for the member's region, the member can't vote in favour? What's the difference between the two? I wonder if the member would highlight that for me.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm really enjoying this grudge match between me and the government House leader.

Speaker, the government House leader knows full well—he has been in federal politics, he has been elected as an MP, he's now an MPP—how it works. This goes back to the Conservative narrative, again, of certain people propping up other governments.

The Liberals had a majority government. They did what they wanted, just as this government does. So to frame a question saying that there was a coalition between us and the Liberals is a myth.

I put it back to the House leader, who often says, “Why won't you work with us?” Why won't you work with us?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Yes, of course, absolutely—especially to follow the member opposite.

I am surprised to learn that the Liberals had a majority government in 2011, 2012 and 2013—because the reality was, it was a Liberal minority government that was in the province of Ontario. That minority government was, in fact, supported by the NDP. The NDP supported that minority government on a condition, and that condition was not long-term care, it wasn't health care funding, it wasn't Ontario Works, it wasn't ODSP, it wasn't education; it was that the government of the time, the Liberal government, would decrease auto insurance rates. That was never included in the 2011 budget. The NDP voted in favour of that budget. It was not included in the 2012 budget—the NDP voted in favour of that—nor in 2013, and they voted in favour.

I'm not sure when that member was elected. I'm assuming the member was elected because of her clear popularity in her area. I'm going to assume that she was elected and was in the chamber on those opportunities to vote in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, when the member voted in favour of or abstained from voting against Liberal budgets that did not increase spending in health, which she said is a priority. But it was okay then for the Liberals not to increase health spending. She talked about ODSP very passionately—that if it was in the budget bill, she might support it. On four occasions, they had an opportunity to do something in minority. It wasn't a priority—on and on and on.

A very simple question today: Is there anything in the budget that, if we removed it from the budget, you would be supportive of?

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member: There was not one item that the member could identify that that member could support. A hospital for the member's own region, something that has been so well received—if we were to pull it out and put it separately, she wouldn't vote for it. So I think with that, it is obvious why I move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Calandra has moved adjournment of the debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

The bells will ring for 30 minutes, during which time members may cast their votes.

To the table: I ask you to please prepare the lobbies.

The division bells rang from 1433 to 1503.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The vote was held on the motion to adjourn the debate.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 36; the nays are 13.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I declare the motion carried.

Debate adjourned.

PROTECTING THE PEOPLE
OF ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2021
LOI DE 2021 VISANT À PROTÉGER
LA POPULATION ONTARIENNE
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 31, 2021, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 269, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 269, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Eglinton–Lawrence.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to rise today and speak in support of Bill 269, the Protecting the People of Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2021. This bill is a critical step in implementing our latest budget, Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy, which was presented by the Minister of Finance one week ago. As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, I'm particularly excited about the record investments in our health care system to help our hospitals and institutions respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic today and to whatever needs may come their way tomorrow.

Our government's number one focus since March 2020 has been to make good on Premier Ford's simple promise to the people of Ontario: We will do whatever it takes to keep you safe, because we recognize as a government that we cannot have a healthy economy without healthy people. Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy carries through on that promise by bringing the government's total investment to protect people's health since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to \$16.3 billion.

Vaccines, of course, are on everyone's mind right now. They are, without question, the way out of this pandemic,

the way our economy gets back to running at full speed—and we all want it to get there as soon as possible.

Yesterday, the province of Ontario set a new daily vaccination record, with 89,873 doses administered—nearly 90,000 doses. Right now, at this very moment, thousands of Ontarians are being vaccinated at a variety of sites across the province. Dozens and dozens of mass clinics have been set up across Ontario by our public health units, hospitals and Ontario health teams, in places like conference centres and arenas. There are also a number of mobile clinics, pharmacies, doctors' offices, community health centres and a multitude of other settings that have either started to administer vaccines or are ready and willing to do so. As soon as we have and they receive sufficient supply from the federal government, they will be doing that.

Vaccination provides not only the very real protection from COVID-19 but also, for the first time in a year and a bit, a true sense of hope that we're finally turning the corner on the pandemic. But we won't be able to fully turn that corner, we won't be able to fully unleash the economic potential of this province until we have enough vaccines to ensure everyone in Ontario who wants one can get one.

We, as a province, are doing our part. Ontario's budget is making more than \$1 billion available for our province-wide vaccination program. Plans are in place to expand the capacity of our mass vaccination centres to more than 150,000 doses per day once supply is available—and as I mentioned earlier, we are well on our way, hitting nearly 90,000 doses yesterday, with plans well under way to expand current clinics and open new ones.

Unfortunately, vaccine supply from the federal government has not kept up with Ontario's ability to administer the vaccines. This week alone, we were told to expect 466,830 doses of Pfizer, 225,400 doses of Moderna, and 583,400 doses of AstraZeneca, yet only the promised doses of Pfizer have actually been delivered to Ontario, which, if you do the math, works out to about only 35% of the total number of vaccines that we were told we would receive this week. As soon as they were received, they were distributed to public health units across the province, and those health units, working with their delivery partners, have gone ahead and booked appointments to use those doses over the coming days. We're now told the Moderna vaccines promised for this week may arrive on April 7, but we still don't have confirmation of that, and we don't even have the estimated date to receive the additional AstraZeneca vaccines, which arrived in Canada on March 30, because Health Canada has not yet approved the manufacturing facility that they came from.

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Without the promised supply, our health units have to scale back their vaccination plans. The York region public health unit, which recently opened an innovative drive-through vaccine clinic in the parking lot of Canada's Wonderland, has been forced to temporarily close that clinic and two others after just a few days of operation. They were counting on the Moderna delivery promised by the federal government. Without those vaccines, they can't

run the clinics. Our hospitals and public health units have suspended future bookings of vaccine appointments or the operation of their mobile clinics until they have more certainty as to when they'll be receiving enough doses to resume full operations.

Speaker, let me be entirely clear: Until we receive enough doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to provide one to every Ontarian who wants one, our work is not over. We appreciate all the efforts that the federal government has made to date to secure vaccines for Ontario and the other provinces and territories, but until we are receiving a reliable and predictable supply of the vaccines, we will not be able to move past this pandemic or return to a sense of normality; we will not be able to unleash the true potential of Ontario's economy.

What we will do is continue to make the necessary investments to support our health care system. We will continue to support the use of testing in our battle with COVID-19. Well over 14 million tests have already been completed in Ontario, and that will continue to increase. Our government is investing \$2.3 billion for more testing in 2021-22, and this brings the total investment since the beginning of the pandemic to \$3.7 billion.

As part of this funding, we will continue to deploy rapid tests as a key part of our strategy. We will provide around 385,000 rapid tests per week in long-term care, 118,000 in retirement homes and 300,000 in essential workplaces, such as manufacturing, warehouses, construction and food processing, to protect our essential workers.

Additionally, to ensure every person who requires hospital care can have access to a bed even during the worst of the pandemic, we've invested an additional \$5.1 billion since the beginning of COVID-19. This has created more than 3,100 additional hospital beds, the equivalent of six new, large community hospitals. That's quite an achievement.

We also recognize one of the most troubling effects of the pandemic has been the worrying backlog of surgeries and other procedures in our hospitals, and that's why our budget makes more resources available to clear that backlog. We're keeping operating rooms open late into the night to make sure that people who have been forced by the pandemic to wait longer than they would or should can get the procedures and care they need.

We're also accelerating our plan to invest more than \$30 billion to build, expand and enhance hospitals across the province over the next decade so that care can be administered in new, state-of-the-art, bigger and better hospitals.

For 15 years, the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, neglected the hallway health care crisis in our province. In this budget, we are making necessary investments to change that.

One of those investments is in the expansion of the Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness in Brampton from an outpatient day facility into a new hospital with in-patient beds and a 24/7 emergency department. This is big news for the community of Brampton and long overdue.

We are also working with Trillium Health Partners on a major redevelopment and hospital expansion in Mississauga and expanding a hospital in Etobicoke, to meet patients' needs in these fast-growing communities.

But that's not all. We are also supporting the planning of a new regional hospital in Windsor-Essex. We are doubling the capacity of the London Health Sciences Centre stem cell transplant unit. We are building a new facility to provide care and treatment to 30,000 families with young patients in Chatham-Kent. We are investing in a new children's treatment centre in Ottawa as part of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

These are significant investments in the future of the health care system here in the province of Ontario. In fact, this is the largest investment in hospitals in Ontario's history, and not a moment too soon.

The pandemic has also created many challenges in the mental health and addictions sector, and our government is responding to those. Since taking office, we have released our Roadmap to Wellness, our \$3.8-billion, 10-year commitment to mental health and addictions funding, providing more psychology treatment to patients, and the first centre of excellence for mental health in the province's history. COVID-19 has only intensified the need for action. To help the thousands of people struggling with mental health and addictions issues, budget 2021-22 makes record investments, including an additional \$175 million in 2021-22 to provide better care for everyone who needs it, bringing our total investment this year to \$525 million. We are going to bring support directly to those who need it. That includes four new mobile mental health clinics to serve rural and underserved communities, and a new program to embed mental health workers in police call centres to ensure people in crisis get the right supports that they need.

Of course, the pandemic has also exposed long-standing challenges in other areas. In our long-term-care homes, we saw a tragedy unfold that was decades in the making, the result of years of neglect and underfunding by governments of all stripes.

The previous government took nearly 10 years to build 611 new beds across the province. We are building 30,000 new beds.

And with this budget, Ontario is investing an additional \$933 million, for a total \$2.6-billion commitment, to make good on our promise on long-term care.

We're investing \$246 million to improve living conditions in existing homes, including ensuring air conditioning for residents.

And to protect our loved ones in long-term care from the deadly COVID-19 virus, Ontario is also investing an additional \$650 million this year to prevent the spread, increase staffing and buy more supplies such as masks. That brings the total additional resources provided since the beginning of the pandemic to over \$2 billion.

Going forward, we are making substantial improvements to the quality of care residents receive. In November, Ontario became the first province to commit to ensuring residents receive, on average, four hours of direct

care per day. As we work to make that promise a reality, many challenges remain in front of us, including the need to hire tens of thousands of new staff to provide the care, which is something that just cannot happen overnight. That is why Ontario is investing \$4.9 billion over four years to increase the average direct care to four hours per day. We will hire more than 27,000 new positions, including personal support workers and nurses, and we're investing over \$121 million right now to support the accelerated training of almost 9,000 personal support workers.

We are also investing \$160 million in the community paramedicine program to bring care and services to the homes of seniors in 33 communities.

Of course, Speaker, there is much more in this budget, much more that is enabled by the legislation in front of the House today.

Since the start of the pandemic, the government has invested more than \$34 billion to support Ontario families, communities and business during one of the most difficult periods our province has gone through. Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy brings the government's total investments to protect Ontario's economy to \$23.3 billion in direct supports.

Through the 2021 budget, we are taking further steps to support the many families, workers and employers who've given so much of themselves to help Ontario withstand this pandemic. This legislation proposes a number of changes to the Taxation Act, 2007, that will bring direct relief to people and businesses.

To provide additional support to parents for child care expenses, the government is proposing a 20% top-up to the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit, or the CARE tax credit, for 2021. I know this is very popular in my riding of Eglinton-Lawrence. Our government first introduced this tax credit in 2019 to help Ontario families with child care costs while letting them choose the care that is right for their children. Parents can choose the child care that works for them—a babysitter, an after-school program, a summer camp or a private daycare—and get back up to 90% of the costs in the form of a refundable tax credit. The top-up proposed in Bill 269 would increase support for parents from \$1,250 to \$1,500, on average. Total support provided by this temporary top-up would be up to about \$75 million, and that would go to more than 300,000 families in Ontario. Crucially, this support will also help parents get back into the workforce now and once the pandemic is fully behind us.

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We're also supporting parents in the province with another round of the Support for Learners grant, now called the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit. To date, the government has provided two rounds of direct funding to parents right across the province: \$200 per child up to grade 12, \$250 for children with special needs up to the age of 21. This funding is available regardless of which school your child attends or your specific child care needs. Again, that's very popular in my riding. As part of this budget, we're providing a third round of payments, and

we're doubling the payments. Parents can now receive \$400 per child aged zero to grade 12 and \$500 per special-needs child up to the age of 21. A family with three children, one of whom has special needs, will receive \$1,300 through this round of payments. Over the duration of the program, this family would have received \$2,600 to support their children's education. In all, this will total \$1.8 billion in direct support through this program alone. This has been a very important and much-appreciated grant, as I've said, for many of my constituents. I'm thrilled to see this expanded and continued in budget 2021.

Bill 269 also aims to help people connect to jobs by proposing the Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit. That would be a temporary refundable personal income tax credit that would ease the burdens on people who are looking to shift careers, retrain or sharpen their skills. The Ontario Jobs Training Tax Credit would also provide an estimated \$260 million in support to about 230,000 people in 2021 and provide up to \$2,000 in relief for 50% of eligible expenses, including graphic design programs, heavy-machinery training programs and post-secondary courses that provide credits towards a degree, diploma or certificate. It also includes personal support worker training, which is absolutely critical to meeting our commitments—and I mentioned this earlier, of course.

Ontario is initiating the largest recruitment and training of PSWs in our province's history to reduce unreasonably long wait-lists and provide better care for our long-term-care residents. It's our hope that people interested in becoming PSWs will take advantage of the jobs training tax credit to help with their training costs, because the people of Ontario need them more than ever.

Throughout the pandemic, our government has been supporting businesses through a wide variety of programs. We've talked about a lot of those. In this budget, we're expanding our support for businesses through measures such as providing a second round of the Ontario Small Business Support Grant payments of \$10,000 or \$20,000 to eligible recipients. Small businesses that are confirmed eligible recipients of the Ontario support grant will be automatically entitled to a second payment in an amount equal to the first payment they received, saving them from the red tape of another application.

Speaker, there are many supports here. I think, together with the extensive financial supports offered by the federal government, including rent and wage subsidies, we're ensuring that our small businesses are able to survive today so they can thrive tomorrow.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that the 14.7 million people of Ontario can accomplish anything when we work towards a common goal. Our hard work, ingenuity and drive for better, stronger families and communities will set us on a path that restores Ontario's place as the economic engine of this country. We will keep doing what's right, not what's easy. It hasn't been, and it won't be, a straight path to the finish line, but we will get through COVID-19. Hope is on the horizon, and until we reach the finish line we will maintain our relentless focus on protecting people's health and our economy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is time for questions. The member from Brampton East.

Mr. Gurattan Singh: We hear from this government the same point over and over again: a false promise about building another hospital in Brampton. But we heard the Premier himself come to Brampton and clarify that in this year's budget there was no money for a hospital in Brampton, and the only commitment they have is potentially investing in Peel Memorial in 2023, after the next election.

Will the government commit to investing in Brampton now—this year, 2021—to properly fund Brampton Civic, to convert Peel Memorial from a health centre into a hospital, to build a third hospital in Brampton, and to make those commitments with real dollars assigned this year in this year's budget?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

I'm so excited about the Brampton hospital—the expansion of the Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness into an in-patient facility with a 24/7 emergency department and 250 in-patient beds. I think it's really big news for Brampton, and I know all of our members are delighted that Brampton is getting this hospital, which has been long overdue. This is the government that's going to make that happen, and I'm just delighted to see it's here—a promise that we've made in our budget and a promise that we will fulfill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I'm excited about this budget.

When the NDP propped up the Liberal budgets over the last many, many years—they were full of empty promises and no health care funding. In 2017, there was a promise of an unfunded plan to increase—a hospital with Trillium Health Partners that would not only help the Mississauga folks; it would help the people in Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Now that the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health is speaking, first of all I'd like to thank her and thank the government for supporting this hospital, which is—as I have been quoted about and have tweeted about—an historical investment in Etobicoke.

Can the parliamentary assistant of health and the member from Eglinton–Lawrence talk about some other good news on the health care side?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I really appreciate the question.

I think it's wonderful that we're able to invest, working with Trillium Health Partners, in the redevelopment and hospital expansion in Mississauga and in Etobicoke to meet patient needs in those fast-growing communities. Those are really exciting projects.

As I mentioned, we're now spending \$16.3 billion throughout the pandemic on health care investments. Obviously, these are significant investments that we've had to make, because health care is at the centre of this issue.

What we're doing is making sure that we provide vaccines for everybody, getting those vaccines distributed as quickly as possible. We know everybody wants things

to get back to normal. We want to be there too, so as soon as we can get those vaccines into people's arms, the most important thing is to make that happen.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House.

To the member: I've got a question for you.

She opened up by saying that the Premier would do everything he could after March 20, 2020—and I remember him saying that, by the way. But in Niagara, we had 370 people die from COVID-19 in our long-term-care facilities and our retirement homes. The province, when they put an iron ring around long-term-care and retirement homes, had 4,000 of our parents, our grandparents, our aunts and uncles die in long-term-care facilities.

My question is pretty simple: Do you really believe the province did everything they could to save lives in long-term-care and retirement homes in the last year?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

The answer is, yes, I do believe that.

Of course, as I said, the pandemic has exposed long-standing challenges in our long-term-care homes—and in many other areas, frankly. We did see a tragedy unfold in our long-term-care homes, but that tragedy, unfortunately, was decades in the making.

Unfortunately, the former Liberal government that was in power for some 15 years—and supported for at least the last four of those years as a minority by the members opposite—let that happen, let that neglect go on. They could have brought that government down by not voting with them, but they didn't. They supported them, and we were left to clean up a very difficult situation in long-term care.

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Unfortunately, we did lose some people—and we all regret the loss of any Ontarian during this pandemic.

Honestly, I had a father in a long-term-care home.

It is very difficult to take care of them, and we need to make sure that we put those resources there, and this budget does it—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further questions?

Mr. Aris Babikian: It is interesting that we have two different types of people: Some people see the glass as half full, and others see the glass as half empty. I belong to the group that sees it as half full, and we should continue filling the glass.

In the last few months, Scarborough received a commitment of building an additional 1,300 long-term-care beds in Scarborough. This is due to the commitment of the Premier, the Minister of Long-Term Care and also the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility.

I would like to ask the member: What additional support are we providing to the long-term-care industry?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member for the question.

I am also very excited about some of our long-term-care investments. I mentioned that we are building 30,000 beds. Scarborough is lucky enough to get some new beds allocated to their area, which I'm sure are sorely needed.

Unfortunately, under the former Liberal government, only 611 beds were built over 10 years, which is terrible, because we have a huge wait-list of people.

We're also investing an additional \$933 million to make that happen, for a total of \$2.6 billion, and we're investing \$246 million in improving living conditions in the existing homes. We're investing in the COVID-19 virus and trying to prevent that from spreading—an additional \$650 million.

There are lots of investments in long-term care, and we continue to also invest in personal support workers and their training and getting more people into the homes to help.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Eglinton—Lawrence for her presentation.

Child care is a very important thing, obviously, not only throughout the pandemic, but it will be very important as we look toward the recovery, especially if it's going to be a fair and just recovery.

The member mentioned an increased child tax credit, but the problem is that there aren't child care spaces for families.

How is it useful to have an increased child tax credit if there aren't the spaces and there isn't the money in the budget for a substantial increase in child care spaces?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

The virtue of the monies that we're putting into the child tax credit and the monies of the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit is that they help parents regardless of the circumstances. Whatever arrangements a parent is able to make for the care of their child, these monies will go directly to the parents and provide support. In my riding, this is very much appreciated. Not everybody has the same schedules. Not everybody can go to the school for the daycare. They might have two children.

The fact that we have left the parents the choice to figure out what works best for them is going to make more spaces available, because everybody will be able to respond in the way that they need—they will be able to purchase the kinds of services that they need and pay for it with these monies and with this tax credit.

I hope that answers your question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you for allowing me to rise today and talk about the budget.

Before I get into my speech, I want to talk about the \$10,000 to \$20,000 small business support plan. I have businesses in Niagara Falls that have applied. They applied back in February, and they haven't gotten the money. They haven't gotten their first \$20,000, never mind the second \$20,000 that they're talking about in the

budget. It's doing my job, and it's my staff doing their job—they do an incredible job every day. We decided to call the minister. We called four times.

Chip n Charlie's is a small business in Niagara Falls that is locally owned, locally run, and 90% of the customers in that place are all local people supporting the business. Why can't this government send them their cheque of \$20,000? They sent me an email today. They're worried. Do you know what they're worried about? They're going to get shut down again because of decisions that were made by your government.

So I'm saying to you, when you stand up and say you're giving \$20,000 to small businesses—it's not happening.

When I do my member's statement tomorrow, I'm going to list them all. It's absolutely ridiculous, so I wanted to make sure I raised that.

I wanted to talk really quickly, before I get into some of the other stuff in my speech—I think I've been cut down from 20 minutes to 10 now, because of all the things that happened here this afternoon.

Meals on Wheels: My colleague talked about not-for-profits, which are the heartbeat of our community. Where is it in your budget? I looked. Do you know what's in it? Nothing for not-for-profits—absolutely disgraceful.

I'll start with my speech, and hopefully, I can get through most of it.

I want to talk about Niagara.

This budget needed to be about two things: It needed to be about health care and jobs.

Mr. Speaker, let me be as clear as possible: Niagara needs a new Niagara Falls hospital. It is unreasonable that it is not a priority in this budget. Before this pandemic began, our hospital was running at over 100% capacity. Hallway medicine—we all remember that, before the pandemic, waiting hours in hallways and emergency rooms for beds that were never becoming available. The government knew it was a problem, and they've done nothing. This pandemic has shown that now, more than ever, we need a hospital in Niagara immediately. The Premier came to Niagara in the last election, and his candidate said the hospital was a Conservative priority. Guess what? I didn't see it in the budget.

Here's what's interesting to me; it's always interesting to me: When a developer wants to pave over the greenbelt, they get a bill. When donors want to give more money, they get legislation passed. And when seniors need a new hospital, the Premier does nothing. I don't think this is right.

There's enough money in this budget to firmly commit to putting shovels in the ground and getting our hospital built. Why doesn't this budget do that? Why, in the middle of a pandemic, does this budget ignore the health care needs in the Niagara region?

Mr. Speaker, I've said this many times in the House: Niagara has the third-highest concentration of seniors in the entire country. We have seniors who deserve access to medical care when they need it and where they need it. We were told they would receive access to a new hospital in Niagara Falls, yet once again the Premier left this out.

This could not only solve future health care problems, but do you know what else it could create? Think about this: It could create jobs in Niagara.

The Premier came to Niagara this week, I think. Do you know what was interesting about that? This government always says, "We like to work together. We've got to talk about issues that are important across the province of Ontario." He came to Niagara, where we've lost 40,000 jobs. We've lost 40,000 jobs in my riding because of the pandemic—but we lost them not just in Niagara Falls; we lost them in Niagara-on-the-Lake. You've been to Niagara-on-the-Lake, we talked about it. Your members have been to Niagara-on-the-Lake. It's a great little community. But they lost jobs there. They lost jobs in Fort Erie, Ridgeway, Crystal Beach, St. Davids, but the Premier didn't even talk about them. Do you know why? Because he played politics with coming to Niagara Falls.

And I want the Premier to come to Niagara Falls. I hope he's not using his—I don't know—using a way to get there. But I'm hoping that he comes to Niagara Falls, because it's important for the Premier to know what we're going through in Niagara—whether it be vaccines, whether it be building a hospital—when he's talking about jobs. But do you know what he should do? He should show the respect to every MPP who's representing down in Niagara. He should have invited Jeff Burch, Jennie Stevens, myself—oh, sorry.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Please do not refer to members by name—but I'll give you 100% leeway if you refer to them by riding.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You're absolutely right, Speaker. I just get going, and away I go sometimes, so I apologize for that.

But I think I got my message across: They should have treated the MPPs from Niagara with a lot more respect than they did.

I talked about my casino. I asked a question over there earlier today: Why isn't the casino in the budget? Some 4,200 people have lost their jobs in our two casinos. Nobody talks about it. It's like they're not there. They're losing their homes. They're losing their families. Nobody talks about it. And do you know what's interesting about the casino? Forty-two hundred jobs are lost—but with the spinoff jobs, it's another six jobs. That means over 20,000 people have lost their jobs in the casino. There's nothing in the budget to address that for those workers. As they tell everybody, they're the party of the workers. Are you kidding me? There's nothing for casino workers.

The hospital could be one part of the plan. That one part of the plan could include building our hospital. There has been a lot of talk about hospitals here. Do you know what you do with a hospital? You use it as an opportunity, with the pandemic, to put people back to work. Hire local businesses. Have the local firms supply the parts and all the stuff they're going to need to build the hospitals. Hire local trades. Hire local apprenticeships.

The last hospital that was built in St. Catharines took 10 years to be built, by the way, at a cost of over a billion

dollars. They hired locally; I give them some respect for that. They hired IBEW electricians. They had over 100 apprentices.

We can do that in Niagara Falls. Let's get our hospital built.

I'm going to talk about more jobs. Another part of our local tourism industry is our wineries and our craft breweries. They provide important jobs in our community and are a vital part of Niagara that makes it so great. There has been a great deal of uncertainty in that industry, and the pandemic only made it worse. Seeing the extension of the VQA support program is encouraging, and I know it will provide some certainty for the industry going forward in these challenging times, but I think the budget missed the mark with some of the primary concerns.

In particular, it's concerning that this government continues to impose an unfair tax on local wineries, while allowing foreign wineries to come in without paying the same tax. I've always been a big proponent of supporting our local industry. I think Niagara makes some of the best wines in the world. So why is this government continuing to impose the 6.1% tax on retail sales? It makes no sense to me. Maybe this government wants to support foreign wineries. Maybe they prefer Australian wines. Maybe they prefer them from China and from France. But they should be doing it right here in Ontario and supporting our wines.

Time goes quick when you've only got 10 minutes. I'm not even halfway through, so I'm going to talk about something that's important to tourism really quickly.

Mr. Speaker, I've got a bill that talks about domestic tourism that we can do right here in the province of Ontario. I put the bill forward, and what I said is, if you go on domestic tourism, if you take your family—mom, dad, the two kids—and you go to Niagara Falls, Ottawa, Toronto, Kingston or up north, you can get a \$1,000 credit. So if you spend \$1,500, you get a \$1,000 credit.

Do you know what the government did? They knew about my bill, but they're saying, "No, you've got to spend \$5,000, and you'll get 20% of that back, for \$1,000." I'm saying to you, there aren't a lot of people coming out of the pandemic who have \$5,000 to go away for domestic tourism, but they might have \$1,500 or \$2,000, knowing they're going to get \$1,000 back. Doesn't that make sense?

So you can stand up and say you support tourism all you want, but if you're going to support tourism when it's safe to come back into Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake and Ottawa—why would you not want to make sure that that credit is available to the most people in the province who could use it?

I've heard the minister say it—I said it before the minister, and I'm glad she copies some of the things I say because that means somebody is listening to me when I stand up and talk. But I want to say, we were hit first; we were hit the hardest.

If this economy wants to get back on its feet, tourism, including in my riding, is probably the most important to get the economy going again—and the way to do that is to support my tax credit and make sure it's \$1,000 for

anybody who wants to travel here in the province of Ontario, the greatest province in Canada.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: Thanks for the comments from the member from Niagara.

Niagara is very important to me, in my personal life. I've told my personal story here many times.

I'm glad he brought up the extension of the VQA supports for small wineries. It was also an extension of the small cidery program.

What he failed to mention about the budget is that we also helped our craft brewers by allowing them to sell their products at farmers' markets. And he forgot to mention the \$10.2-million program in support grants for the cideries and small wineries that were most heavily impacted by this pandemic.

My question to the member is, will you be voting against or for supporting the extension of the VQA program and that grant for this hard-hit sector in Niagara?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I certainly appreciate his question.

I didn't hear him mention the fact that your government did not put in one of the most important things in this budget, and that's the 6.1% tax that small wineries are paying—20% of the wineries in Niagara may have to close because of that tax. That unfair tax—he never touched it. Quite frankly, the member from Niagara West supported my bill, saying it was unfair to the wineries in his riding—yet absolutely nothing in this budget to support that, and your government knows it quite well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question to the member for Niagara Falls—he talked about tourism, and he and I would both know, having casinos and being border towns, how important it is to support our casino workers who have been out of work for well over a year.

I know he has had a few long-term-care and retirement homes that were really hard-hit with COVID-19. I believe he mentioned one of them, where 100% of the residents and 100% of the workers contracted COVID-19.

I'd like the member for Niagara Falls to talk about why it would have been important for the government to include in this bill—or support my colleague's bill, this morning, to increase PSW wages. Why would it be so important for the government to have put something in the bill that actually supports PSWs and increases their wages—and also investment that goes directly to the front-line workers and the hands-on care for residents?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I certainly appreciate the question.

Probably one of the hardest things over Christmas was to watch the Oakwood long-term-care facility have an outbreak, where 40 people died. They died because they didn't have enough staffing; they didn't have PPE. Niagara Health had to go in there and have some expertise to get them out of that.

What we needed to do—we had a year to do it, and this is why it drives me crazy when they talk over there. In the first wave, we had 3,000 people die. We had 10 months to fix it—get more PPE; hire more staff; pay PSWs properly

with real wages, real benefits, full-time jobs. They chose not to do it because they said they had an iron ring.

Guess what happened because we didn't make those investments in PSWs and in PPE in these long-term-care homes? Four thousand people died. That's the problem.

So to her question: We should have hired more PSWs. We should have paid them properly. We should have made sure they had benefits. And we should have made sure they had full-time jobs. If we would have done that, 4,000 seniors—our parents, our grandparents, aunts and uncles—wouldn't have died in long-term-care facilities.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: I'm glad the member from Niagara Falls brought up the 6.1%.

In the conversations I've had with the Wine Growers Ontario, the Grape Growers of Ontario, Ontario Craft Wineries and many others, they understand that the trade challenge imposed by Australia was settled here in Ontario, but not in Quebec. So any changes to the settlement or the tax measures here would actually jeopardize the settlement we've reached with Australia currently, leaving an \$80-million net impact on the smallest of small wineries in Niagara Falls.

Does the member suggest that we disregard the progress we've made in that trade dispute and then pass that \$80-million net impact along to the wineries in Niagara?

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Mr. Wayne Gates: I certainly appreciate the question. I'm going to ask you one, as well, because I don't get a chance to talk to you very often.

In the first part of my speech, I asked about the \$20,000. You have stood up in this House many, many times and said they would get that money within weeks. I am saying to you, sir—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Direct your comments to the Chair, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sorry. It's almost—I just turned a bit.

At the end of the day, I am saying to that member: Help me get help for Chip n Charlie's, for the Fort Erie golf course, and get them their \$20,000. That's what you have to do. Why do I have to call a minister and not get a return call from a staff member for over six weeks? These are small businesses. These are the ones that your party says you care about. Can you help me get them their money? That's what I need from you.

On the 6.1% tax—the wine industry wants that bill passed. You know it, and I know it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my friend from Niagara Falls. I've been listening to him speak for 25 years, and he keeps getting better and better all the time.

He started out talking about small businesses. I know that my friend has received a lot of the same calls in his office that I have, from small businesses that applied for the first grant and aren't getting any kind of response from

the government—last week, at least, some businesses, no response for up to two months; not a “no,” not a “yes,” just no response at all.

In this budget, the government has come out with another round of that. My question is, what good is it to come out with another round if they aren't answering people from the first round, and what opportunities did the government miss to really support small businesses in this budget?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you again. I appreciate it.

I don't agree with Jeff a lot, but I certainly agree with his opening comment—sorry, the member from Niagara Centre. I do appreciate your comment.

On that issue: I really don't understand how we can't get money into the hands of the small businesses. Do you know how many small businesses we've lost in the province of Ontario because we didn't help them? We waited 11 months to help them. And what did we do? We put a program out that—by the way, the member and myself have spoken about it and said it was a good program. They needed help. They need other help as well, like my colleague said, but they needed that money. They've waited two months.

And tomorrow I'm hearing that the Premier may say that we're going to shut down again—I don't know how extensive it's going to be.

That business, Chip n Charlie's, called me today and said, “Gatesy, I need the money. I'm scared.” The community will rally around Chip n Charlie's. They love the restaurant. But this government said they were going to get their \$20,000. They haven't got it yet—the first \$20,000—and now you put in another program of \$20,000 that they haven't got either. What good is having a program if they don't work, if they can't get the money? Come on—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further questions?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: First of all, we have approximately 120,000 small businesses that will automatically benefit from an additional \$1.7 billion in relief through the second round of supports in the form of grants. If you were just tuning in today you'd think that nobody was getting any money—but, yes, \$1.7 billion in relief is going to be made to these small businesses. I've received calls and emails to my office thanking the government for the relief they have received—for the \$20,000—and they will automatically receive that extra bit that is in this budget.

Does the member opposite believe in these supports for small businesses? Do you believe they should be getting this money? Right now, it sounds like you're not going to be voting in favour of this budget. Will you be supporting this in this budget?

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's an interesting question. Either I'm not being clear and I'm not as good a speaker as that member thinks I am, or, unfortunately, she's not listening.

I'm not saying the program isn't any good. I'm saying we need the program. Small business needed help 11 months ago, and you did nothing. Now you put a program in place. What you're saying is \$1.4 billion, I think—

because you guys are always throwing out so many numbers that I get them confused—it might be \$1.4 billion that we've given to small businesses. I'm saying I've got five businesses in Niagara that aren't getting it. I'm not saying the program is bad. I'm saying our businesses need help. We're losing businesses left, right and centre in Niagara. I'm not saying the program is not good, but if you put \$20,000 out here and \$20,000 out here, and I can't get to it, it's absolutely useless.

So what I'm saying to you—and I'm asking for help from your government—is, please take a look at these businesses and get them their money so they don't go under, so people don't lose their jobs and hurt our economy in Niagara Falls.

I do appreciate your comment—but that's the issue: It's not the program; we can't get the money.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: It's hard to follow the member from Niagara Falls. It's going to take me a while to ramp up to get there—but he's exactly right.

I have two constituents who I'm trying to help access this program. They haven't been able access the office or were not getting a response from the liaison.

I'm not saying that—because I'm going to say something nice in a second here, folks, so I just want you to know that.

There's a problem there, and it needs to be fixed. He's right. That's what he's talking about. He's not complaining about the program.

Everybody was so happy when I came in. It has kind of turned down a little bit here.

I'm going to start with something you wouldn't normally start with in a budget debate, as an opposition member. I'm going to tell you two things that I think are good. Number one, I know the member from Ottawa West—Nepean is not here, but I had a chance to thank him earlier today for his work to make sure that CHEO 1Door4Care happened—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me just for a moment. I want to keep you on that positive note, by the way, but I also want to remind you that you shouldn't be making reference to someone who isn't here.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, I'm sorry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I knew you knew that.

Mr. John Fraser: I'll take that back.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): You don't have to take it back. I'm just reminding you; that's all.

Mr. John Fraser: I wanted to say something in appreciation of him, so it was not intended as—but you are right.

The member from Ottawa West—Nepean—I had a chance to talk to him earlier today about his efforts on 1Door4Care. I very much appreciate the work that he did. I did a lot of work on that earlier, in the previous government, and getting it over the line was a really critical thing for all of us in Ottawa, no matter what political stripe we

were. It's going to be really important for families, and so I want to say that's a good thing.

The other really good thing, I think, is the expansion of community paramedicine. It's something that started back about 2014 or 2015, and it needed to expand, and it really needed to expand now. I am glad that has happened. I think all of our communities feel that way.

Those are the positive things.

I am really concerned about public health and the lack of clarity about the government's plans for public health beyond the current vaccination campaign. As you can remember, the government was making some pretty serious cuts to public health. They had to back away from Toronto Public Health, but there was still an intention to put more financial responsibility on municipalities. That's still there; that hasn't changed. And so while I see the investment in the current vaccination campaign, I'm concerned that there is no plan in the budget if we have to do that again next year, which is a likelihood. I don't see the risk in there. I don't see that as a set-aside. I don't see it mentioned in the budget that we may have to vaccinate everybody again this time next year. I think that's a fair risk to put in, so I'm surprised that it's not there.

This pandemic, actually, coming on the heels of what was happening with this government and public health, really showed how important public health is—not just in this situation with the pandemic, but flu vaccinations, maternal newborn programs, inspecting restaurants, inspecting medical facilities, clean water, and ensuring that everybody is safe. It's a really important piece of our communities. I know those of us who served as municipal politicians—I haven't, but I'm very involved in the municipality—know how important that is. I expected to see a bigger commitment from the government—longer commitment, more defined commitment—to public health beyond \$1 billion for vaccinations. It's important, and we need it, but we also need that other piece.

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The other piece that I was really surprised not to see any mention of or investment in in the budget was home care—it's absolutely incredible. Home care is an important piece that enables people to live in their homes longer when they're frail and elderly, and sometimes when they have medical conditions and they're younger and they want to stay in their own home. They don't want to be in a long-term-care home or in a chronic care hospital. There's no plan in the budget to increase that. There's no plan in the budget to say what the government is going to do with that. The people who deliver home care in this province are saying, "Did you forget us? We're not even mentioned." It's a massive piece of our health care system, and it's one, actually, right now, because of the pandemic, that's under a lot of stress and strain. The reason it's under a lot of stress and strain is, they're losing their workers. They're losing their workers to long-term care. They're losing their workers to hospitals. There's a tremendous amount of pressure there. If we don't get that right, it's just going to put more pressure on our long-term-care homes. That's what's going to happen.

I've talked to my mom; my mom doesn't want to go to long-term care. Any of us, we're aging—if you go into your communities and you start talking about long-term care, seniors say, “That's not where I'm going. I want to stay at home.” We have to listen to them. We can't just keep doing the same thing and think it's going to change or work out differently. We can't just build more and think it's going to be better. We have to try to do things differently. We have to look at places around the world that invest in things like home care, like community supports.

That's another piece. The community support people are saying, “Where are we?” Where are these agencies that leverage millions of dollars in volunteer help to support their communities? They're not there.

You're going to laugh when I say this: Some of the folks on the other side—not the members, but people who work for some members—were spinning that your budget was a Liberal budget. It wasn't.

There are a lot of things missing that should have been there. Your budget is a road map, it's a plan—it's not just the numbers. Don't just tell me what the numbers are. Tell me what you're going to do. Tell me what you're going to do in home care. Tell me what you're going to do to actually raise the wages of PSWs beyond the end of June. Tell me what you're going to do about paid sick days. Tell me what you're going to do about ensuring that PSWs in long-term care and home care have full-time jobs with benefits and stability. Tell me what you're going to do about the she-cession. We all know that women are predominantly the most affected in this pandemic. We don't need a panel. The panel is six months ago. What we need are things like paid sick days and more investment in child care than the government is putting in right now. We need training and education, upskilling focused on those who have been affected most by the pandemic—and that is mostly women and racialized communities. We don't need a panel. We all know what's there. We all know what we can do to fix it.

That's what should have been in the budget. There are a few more things, but I only have about a minute. But I do want to say one thing that I have a question about, and that has to do with the government's \$234 million earmarked to create and budget six new plasma collection sites. It's unclear who the recipient of the funding is for those plasma sites. Is it Canadian Blood Services? It wasn't disclosed in the budget. Are they private companies? It doesn't say.

I know we have the Voluntary Blood Donations Act, so I think that means it's supposed to go to Canadian Blood Services, but that's not entirely clear. I know that we have the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, so maybe in the questions, when she's asking me a question, she can slide in that answer—not to ask a question in debate. I'd really appreciate it if the member could clarify that for me.

I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: I appreciate the member opposite's comments, and recognizing that a budget is indeed a road-map, a plan. Our first phase of this plan was introduced when the pandemic began back in March of last year, and that was followed up in November with our second phase, the budget of 2020. This is our third phase in our response to COVID-19.

My question to the member opposite is very simple: If he doesn't like the way our government is planning, does he suggest that we follow the way the Liberals planned when they were in government? I'll remind the member that they missed eight of their last 14 financial reporting periods. They didn't have a plan, Speaker.

Mr. John Fraser: I didn't catch the last comment. I didn't have what?

Interjection: A plan.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, we had a very clear plan.

To the member opposite, you know what? The government really likes to fluff its numbers: “The budget deficit? It's \$15 billion.” It took the Auditor General and the Financial Accountability Officer and the public accounts to tell you that you dealt with it, that you were wrong.

Here's the thing: Don't tell me what the numbers are; tell me what you're going to do. And that's what I'm telling you, in public health. Go to any budget. It was very clear what we were going to do with home care; it was very clear what we were going to do about Canadian Blood Services; it was very clear about what we were going to do around drug pricing. Your budget is barely 200 pages.

Mr. Stan Cho: It's 211.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, 211. That's about two thirds the size of most other budgets. That's because, in most other budgets, even in some of yours, you talked a little bit more about what you were going to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'd like to ask the member a couple of things. I'm just going to share some words from my constituents.

Sarah wrote to me about applying for a small business grant on January 19. They were told that they would qualify in mid-February for \$10,000. They still haven't received the money since that time. They've checked on-line; they're still approved. They can't meet their family's needs. They're wondering if the money was deposited in someone else's account, because it doesn't make any sense that they don't have it. They are struggling. She's been out of work since January.

Someone else has said that they were supposed to receive it. They have told us that they announced it for those who would qualify for the next round, but they still haven't gotten it from the first. She's worried if they're going to be bumped to the bottom. They can't get an answer from their own MPP, so they're using my office.

Are you hearing the same things? What do we tell them?

Mr. John Fraser: I thank the member from Oshawa for that question. I was actually on the phone with my

constituency office, and I have two individuals who are in very similar kinds of situations, one where there's a problem with their business number that they've been trying to solve for weeks but haven't been able to make any connection. We talked to the liaison. And another one, again, the same thing: concerned that they haven't been approved, it's at the end, and another program is coming up. Look, I know these things are hard; I know it's busy; I know they're new. But just get back to people.

It was like last week with the vaccinations in Ottawa: The government knew there was a problem for a day and a half or two days, but did nothing to tell the seniors in Ottawa, "Hey, don't come online right now. Don't call us. Give us a day, because it's not working." Instead, people were calling. They're frustrated; they're angry; they're tired. It's happening to small businesses, and it happened to thousands of seniors in Ottawa last Monday and Tuesday.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: To the member opposite from Ottawa South: Frankly, I'm kind of shocked that you can talk about long-term care and criticize the plans in the budget about long-term care when you were in office for 15 years and, over the last 10 years, built only 611 beds.

You said, "People don't want to go into long-term care." You said it now, so what you're saying is we should leave seniors who need the support of long-term care with no place to go. That was your plan in the last government that you had and that was supported by the NDP? You didn't build any beds, so they had nowhere to go, and you're suggesting that we should do the same thing.

You suggest we should do things differently, but your government is the one that created this situation. I would ask, how you can suggest that we're not investing in long-term care and in the community?

Mr. John Fraser: I'll go back. That number of 611 new beds is accurate, but it doesn't take into account redeveloped beds. Between 2003 and 2018 there were 30,000 new and redeveloped beds. We also raised PSW wages by \$4 an hour, invested in behavioural supports and invested in nurse practitioners.

What I'm trying to say to you is you can build as many beds as you'd like, but if you don't try to keep people in the community where they want to be, you can fill up three times as many as you're building. And if you don't actually pay the people a decent wage and give them full-time jobs with benefits and treat them with respect, you're not going to have anybody to deliver that care. That's my point.

I'm not telling you not to build the beds. I'm telling you, actually, to take an approach that's going to work. The one that you're taking is not going to work.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

M. Guy Bourgoïn: Ma question est : je vous entendais parler, là, de la « roadmap », la route cahoteuse, qu'on entend de ce gouvernement-là. Mais surtout, je

voudrais vous entendre—parce que nous, ce qu'on entend, c'est un peu la même affaire, que la mappe n'est pas claire—alentour du fameux « anneau d'acier » que ce gouvernement-là nous disait, pour des soins de longue durée. Puis dans le budget, avec tout ce qui se passe avec les soins de longue durée, puis que les personnes âgées commencent à craindre d'aller voir—puis le soutien qui vient aux services aux résidences. On voit de moins en moins que le monde ne veut pas aller dans les soins de longue durée. Ils veulent rester plus longtemps à la maison. Pourquoi? Avec la situation qui s'est créée avec le fameux anneau d'acier qui n'a jamais existé, à cette heure, le monde veut rester à la maison. Mais on voit que, dans le budget, c'est silencieux. J'aimerais vous entendre à ce propos.

M. John Fraser: J'essaie en français. C'est très curieux, l'absence des soins à domicile. Le point : les aînés resteront à la maison. En anglais : That's where they're most comfortable.

We're lucky; my mom has been able to stay in her home for three years. She had a stroke. Not everybody's that lucky. Not everybody has four kids who live in the same city. That's why we need home care, because what my mom gets, other moms deserve. That's why we needed to see that investment in the budget. That's why we needed to see a plan.

Merci pour votre question. Je m'excuse pour une réponse partiellement en anglais.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Stan Cho: I have a lot of respect for the member from Ottawa South, but, with respect, I didn't get an answer to my last question, so I'll pivot to a different topic that's in the budget—

Mr. John Fraser: I didn't hear your last word.

Mr. Stan Cho: Maybe I'll speak louder, then, for the member.

The member is criticizing the small business grant support program. There's another iteration of it, a doubling up, and I want to remind the member that 5,186 businesses, as of Monday morning, have received more than \$79 million of grant—up to \$20,000. The question is simple, Mr. Speaker, through you: Will you vote for or against an additional almost \$80 million for those 5,186 businesses in the Ottawa area?

Mr. John Fraser: I can't vote for a budget that doesn't include home care. I can't vote for a budget that doesn't include permanent raises for PSWs. I can't vote for a budget that doesn't give them full-time jobs. I can't vote for a budget that doesn't give PSWs benefits. I can't vote for a budget that doesn't make a clear plan for public health. Do you know why? Because that's not what people need.

What people need is a government that's going to focus on the things that are the most important, and making sure the people who care for the people whom we care for most are paid well and given permanent jobs. Full-time jobs are an important thing. Having a steady plan for public health, a robust plan for public health, is what we need now and beyond this pandemic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: There's a reason that budget days are a particular highlight of my time as the member for Mississauga Centre. Budget day is the day that Ontarians across the province get to see the commitment of the government laid out in full. It's the day where Ontarians who are struggling learn of the help now available to support them. It's the day when stakeholders in our key industries recognize that they have a strong partner in the government that wants to help them prosper. Finally, it's the day when our cherished institutions, like our world-class public health care system, are assured the tools and resources that they need to properly serve the people of Ontario. That is why I am both honoured and excited to stand in the House today to speak to a budget that has so much for the people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus my remarks on the francophone community and the exciting investments of this budget.

Nos communautés francophones ici en Ontario font partie intégrante de cette province depuis 400 ans, et je suis fière de me tenir debout aujourd'hui dans cette Assemblée pour souligner les investissements dans ce budget qui continueront de soutenir la francophonie en Ontario.

Comme tout le monde, nos communautés francophones ont été durement frappées par cette pandémie, mais en particulier, les organismes à but non lucratif. Ces organismes s'appuient sur la générosité de leurs communautés pour être capables d'offrir leurs services. Mais en raison de la pandémie, les familles n'ont pas de surplus dans lesquels elles peuvent puiser pour soutenir ces organismes.

C'est pour cette raison que les investissements de notre gouvernement sont tellement importants. À travers le Fonds de secours pour les organismes francophones sans but lucratif, suite à la COVID-19, notre gouvernement soutient les organismes à but non lucratif dans nos communautés franco-ontariennes. Nous avons déjà investi 2 millions de dollars dans ce fonds pour soutenir ces organismes au cours de la pandémie, et dans le budget 2021-2022, nous ajoutons 1 million de dollars supplémentaires.

Cet investissement va aider des organismes à but non lucratif à couvrir les coûts de fonctionnement liés à leurs activités. Avec ce fonds, ces organismes seront capables de recruter du personnel bilingue compétent de leur communauté et de retenir ces travailleurs, créant des emplois et contribuant à l'économie croissante. En investissant dans ces organisations communautaires, notre gouvernement évite les fermetures et s'assure que ces organismes vont être là pour servir leurs communautés longtemps après la fin de la pandémie de la COVID-19.

Ce budget soutient également la relance économique dans les communautés francophones en doublant notre financement du Programme d'appui à la francophonie ontarienne. À travers ce programme, les communautés francophones en Ontario bénéficieront d'un

investissement supplémentaire de 3 millions de dollars sur trois ans pour mieux répondre aux besoins et à la demande de soutien accrue des organismes communautaires, y compris les entreprises sociales et les petites entreprises. Avec ce nouvel investissement, nous mettons maintenant 2 millions de dollars par an à la disposition des organismes desservant les francophones. Ces fonds aideront les entreprises et les entrepreneurs desservant les francophones à promouvoir leurs biens et services et soutiendront aussi des initiatives culturelles.

Monsieur le Président, la culture, la langue et l'histoire francophones sont très riches, et nous devons mettre en valeur ces aspects clés de la francophonie de l'Ontario. C'est pourquoi ce budget alloue près de 300 millions de dollars pour soutenir 14 festivals francophones. Il met également de côté plus de 1,5 million de dollars pour soutenir 36 organismes de tourisme francophones, ainsi que 75 000 \$ pour développer de nouvelles expériences touristiques autochtones et francophones. Ces investissements aideront à inciter les Ontariens et Ontariennes à découvrir nos communautés francophones pour vivre et en apprendre plus sur notre francophonie.

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Étant donné qu'un grand nombre de nos communautés francophones se trouvent au nord de l'Ontario, nous devons également investir dans le transport entre ces communautés et les villes plus peuplées dans le sud de la province. En investissant 5 millions de dollars dans les services de trains de passagers entre le sud et le nord de l'Ontario, ce budget offre un meilleur avenir pour nos communautés francophones. Ces investissements aideront à attirer des étudiants aux écoles francophones dans le Nord et à amener de nombreux touristes dans la région, ce qui contribuera au développement économique de nos communautés francophones.

Ce budget nous aide également à maintenir nos relations avec le Québec en investissant 250 000 \$ chaque année pendant trois ans pour appuyer des projets interprovinciaux menés par des organismes franco-ontariens dans le cadre de l'accord de coopération et d'échanges entre le gouvernement du Québec et le gouvernement de l'Ontario en matière de la francophonie. Il est important pour nous de maintenir une étroite relation avec le Québec, et cet investissement nous aidera à y parvenir.

Pour nos communautés francophones, l'accès à une éducation de haute qualité dans leur langue est d'une grande importance. Ce budget inclut des fonds pour bâtir de nouvelles écoles de langue française partout à travers la province. Une nouvelle école élémentaire publique de la langue française sera bâtie à North York. L'établissement accueillera 412 élèves et comprendra également un service de garde d'enfants de 73 places. La communauté de Blind River verra une nouvelle école publique bilingue, pouvant accueillir 453 élèves aux niveaux élémentaire et secondaire, ainsi qu'un service de garde d'enfants avec 64 places. Ces investissements dans l'éducation en français sont très importants pour nos communautés francophones ici en Ontario, et je suis fière du soutien que notre gouvernement leur apporte dans ce budget.

Un des deux piliers de ce budget est évidemment la santé des Ontariens et des Ontariennes. Ce budget complètera la tâche que notre gouvernement a entamée il y a un an et mettra fin à cette pandémie. C'est pourquoi nous investissons autant dans les programmes de vaccination, pour assurer que chaque Ontarien qui souhaite être vacciné le sera.

Cependant, cette pandémie a également mis en évidence les sous-investissements des gouvernements précédents dans notre système de soins de longue durée, alors notre gouvernement renverse cette réalité. Nous investissons considérablement dans nos foyers de soins de longue durée, afin de protéger nos aînés et de leur garantir les soins qu'ils méritent.

Pour les aînées francophones, il est tellement important pour nous de leur permettre de vieillir tout en continuant de vivre dans leur langue. C'est pourquoi je suis fière que près de 6 % des nouveaux lits et des lits modernisés dans les foyers de soins de longue durée seront alloués aux francophones de la province. Ce budget investit dans nos aînés francophones. Le Bennett Centre à Georgetown, le Centre d'accueil Roger-Séguin à Clarence Creek, un nouveau bâtiment à Orléans, Fairview Mennonite Home à Cambridge, le Foyer des Pionniers à Hearst, le Foyer Richelieu Welland à Toronto, le Maxville Manor à Maxville, et le Victoria Village Manor à Barrie—tous ces foyers vont avoir plus de places à offrir aux francophones de cette province grâce aux investissements supplémentaires de notre gouvernement dans ce budget. Nous investissons pour permettre aux aînés francophones de vieillir dans leur langue en accédant aux services dont ils ont besoin. En faisant cela, nous respectons nos aînés francophones.

Dans l'ensemble, le budget apporte une aide financière importante à nos communautés franco-ontariennes. Nous augmentons le budget total du ministère des Affaires francophones à 8,8 millions de dollars, y compris 2,3 millions de dollars de soutien en raison de la pandémie.

Avec ce budget, ce gouvernement envoie un message bien clair aux Franco-Ontariens et aux Franco-Ontariennes : Nous sommes là pour vous. Notre gouvernement est un gouvernement pour les gens de l'Ontario et nous continuerons de l'être.

Mr. Speaker, in my last few seconds, I would like to address the member from Windsor West and respond to her remarks earlier, because I, too, have an affinity for Polish food, and I was dubbed the perogy gal of our caucus. So I would like to let her know that, respectfully, instead of grandstanding, I suggest that she does her job, because today, through the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we had our first training for organizations to apply. Dom Polski, the organization she referred to, was not aware that this funding is available to them. So in the meantime, I actually gave them a call, to Malgorzata Holec, the president, and my office has forwarded all the information necessary so that they may apply for this funding—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. It's time for questions.

M^{me} Marit Stiles: Je veux remercier la députée de Mississauga-Centre.

Alors que les gens ont besoin d'aide plus que jamais, ce gouvernement a commencé les coupures. Alors que les gens ont besoin de soins de longue durée, d'hôpitaux plus solides et de plus d'appui dans les écoles, ce gouvernement leur serre la vis.

Est-ce que la députée peut expliquer pourquoi son gouvernement a failli aux citoyens de l'Ontario encore?

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Merci beaucoup pour la question, et félicitations pour avoir parlé en français. Je pense que c'est très important qu'on parle français dans cette Chambre et que tous les députés fassent un effort de parler en français.

Notre gouvernement investit dans les communautés franco-ontariennes. Nous avons aussi déclaré le drapeau franco-ontarien comme symbole officiel de la province. Alors cela démontre notre respect pour la communauté et pour son histoire riche pour plus de 400 ans ici en Ontario.

On fait des investissements qui sont dirigés pour le soutien de nos organismes à but non lucratif, nos petites entreprises et, bien sûr, dans les soins de longue durée. Alors je suis très fière de ce budget et de tout ce que ce budget signifie pour la communauté franco-ontarienne.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Robin Martin: I wanted to commend the member from Mississauga Centre on her great speech. I know she has a number of interests. She's a nurse, so there are a couple of questions that I'd like to ask her, but I guess one thing I'd like her to respond to, if she can, is how she feels about the health care investments in the budget. But I'd also like to ask her if she wanted to explain more about the perogies and how we could get funding for Polish cultural institutions and perogy-makers of all sorts, because I am also a queen of the perogy. I love perogies. They're the best.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you so much for this question. I am so proud of the investment that our government is making, especially in the region of Peel, to support our hospitals. In part of this budget, we have announced that our Trillium Health Partners—we will be completely reconstructing the M-site. This is a historic investment for our city, because, as you know, our city is growing very fast, and the health care needs are always expanding. This investment will create a hub of innovation and research in Mississauga. We'll be promoting women and children's health and will position Mississauga and the region of Peel as a leader in the community.

Of course, as the member is aware, we are also building a second hospital in Brampton. This is great news for the people of Brampton. We have listened to their concerns, including to the members opposite who asked for a second hospital, and this budget delivers a second hospital for the people of Brampton.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Je suis d'accord avec vous, la députée de Mississauga-Centre, que c'est tout le temps un plaisir d'entendre le monde parler en français en Chambre.

Ma question : vous avez parlé des soins de longue durée. Ça va sans dire—on s'en est parlé un petit peu

aujourd'hui—que vous êtes sans doute au courant de la situation de crise qu'on a vécue à Kapuskasing dans les soins de longue durée, où il y a eu 16 morts, 19 « staff » qui ont eu la COVID; 30 % sont décédés dans une maison de soins de longue durée. Puis quand j'entends, premièrement, les 12 lits à Hearst que j'ai entendu mentionnés, je suis content que—mais il ne faut pas oublier que c'était une demande depuis 2014. Ce n'était pas du nouveau, là. Ce n'est pas d'aujourd'hui qu'on demandait 12 lits à Hearst. Ils sont bienvenus, parce que c'était de longues attentes. Ça prenait 12 ans pour avoir un lit à Hearst.

1630

Ma question est simple. On n'a eu aucune annonce. J'ai demandé deux fois à la ministre de nous aider dans cette situation de crise. Deux fois elle a dit qu'ils étaient au-dessus de la situation, qu'on ne répéterait pas—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Question?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question est : pourquoi est-ce dans ce projet de loi, on n'a pas eu de lits additionnels pour Kapuskasing, qui a vécu une crise dans une éclosion de COVID?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. To the member from Mississauga Centre for your response.

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Merci beaucoup au député. J'étais heureuse de parler avec lui aujourd'hui au sujet des priorités du NPD quand il s'agit des communautés francophones. Je peux dire qu'on est alliés dans certaines priorités, alors j'ai hâte de travailler avec lui pour atteindre nos priorités communes.

Mais il a parlé des investissements dans les soins de longue durée, alors je dois réitérer que ce budget a un investissement de 2,6 milliards de dollars pour construire un total de 30 000 lits partout dans notre province, dont 777 lits francophones complètement nouveaux ou modernisés. Alors ça, c'est un investissement de 6 % de tous les lits qu'on a annoncés, qui sont francophones. Ça c'était un but qu'on s'était posé avec la ministre des Affaires francophones et la ministre des Soins de longue durée. On est très fier qu'on bâtit de nouveaux lits francophones dans notre province, y compris à Toronto. Pour la première fois, on va avoir le Foyer Richelieu Welland ici à Toronto pour 250 nouveaux lits francophones à Toronto—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further questions?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I want to thank the member from Mississauga Centre for her statements today. I know she is very passionate about health care, and I just want to chat a little about the long-term-care commitments that were in this budget.

We're very fortunate in Etobicoke–Lakeshore that we're going to be receiving 256 new long-term-care beds, which is a great announcement, and unlike the previous Liberals, propped up by the NDP for many, many years—they only brought in 611 beds over 10 years. I'd like to ask the member what type of supports for long-term care did you find in this budget?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: Thank you very much for that question. As I mentioned before, we are investing \$2.6 billion in long-term care but in addition to that, we are investing \$121 million to train close to 9,000 PSWs in our province because we recognized that the long-term-care industry has been neglected for years by previous governments.

We're funding this education for our PSWs, including for francophone PSWs through our partners at La Cité and le Collège Boréal. They will actually be starting their classes on April 5. The very first cohort of PSWs will be welcomed in our 24 publicly funded colleges across Ontario. So this is a significant investment.

In addition, as you know, we are ensuring four hours of direct care per resident per day in our long-term-care homes. This is something that the industry has asked for in the consultations that we had led with the PA for long-term care, and we are delivering on exactly what the industry has asked for.

I'm very proud of everything that this budget does for long-term care and our PSWs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further questions?

Back to the member from Mushkegowuk—James Bay.

M. Guy Bourgouin: À ma collègue de Mississauga-Centre, vous avez entendu sûrement du dossier de la Laurentienne. On sait que le premier, avec l'Université de l'Ontario français—vous vous êtes traîné les pieds assez raide. Vous avez même créé un jeudi noir. C'est le fédéral qui vous a sauvé, si je peux utiliser le terme. Puis pour quatre ans de temps, même si vous prenez le crédit, ça coûte zéro cents à la province. Mais ce qui était intéressant puis qu'on a vu dans ce budget, c'est zéro dollars pour la Laurentienne. Pourtant, le ministre Romano s'est traîné les pieds pendant six mois en sachant la situation financière. Alors, encore une fois, quand on sait que des universités francophones, il n'en mouille pas en province, pourquoi est-ce que votre budget est silencieux sur l'Université Laurentienne?

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Alors, monsieur le Président, on est très fier de soutenir l'éducation en langue française aux niveaux secondaire et postsecondaire. Comme vous le savez, notre gouvernement a signé une entente historique avec le fédéral pour créer l'Université de l'Ontario français, gérée par et pour les francophones. Le gouvernement précédent n'a pas pu faire cela. C'est notre gouvernement qui est à l'écoute de la communauté francophone, et on était si excité de signer cette entente.

Finalement, l'Université de l'Ontario français ouvre ses portes aux étudiants ce septembre 2021. On est très excité d'accueillir nos étudiants. On a quatre programmes maintenant de baccalauréat, qui vont servir pour éduquer une main-d'oeuvre bilingue qui est si importante dans notre province pour avoir des gens qu'on peut engager dans nos industries et dans nos agences gouvernementales. Alors, on est très excité d'accueillir les nouveaux étudiants, et j'espère que le député va nous appuyer dans ce projet.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Burch: It's a pleasure to join the debate today on the budget motion. Just to create a little context, I wanted to point out that this budget is actually over \$4 billion less than the last budget. There are a lot of long-term promises in the budget, but it's important to understand that we're in a situation where the government has reduced the budget over last year.

I want to say at the outset that budget 2021 should have been a courageous, bold plan that invested strategically in the caring economy, ensuring that people have the resources they need to stay safe in the pandemic. That is key, obviously, to our economic recovery, and the two go hand in hand. So this is a very important budget, because not only are we caring for people going into the third wave, but hopefully preparing for a recovery in the year ahead.

But we're still grappling with COVID. Just yesterday, Ontario saw its biggest single-day jump in intensive care admissions since the pandemic began. We confirmed yesterday over 2,300 more cases. According to the province's report, there are currently 1,090 patients in hospital for reasons related to the coronavirus. For almost three weeks leading up to March 15, that number was regularly between 600 and 700. The Ontario Hospital Association cautioned that the province could face a surge of patient transfers and cancelled surgeries as we fight a third wave of COVID-19.

It's a very important budget, in a time where it's very disturbing to see our ICU numbers at the rate they're at right now. When I read that Ontario's hospitals and doctors could soon be forced to use an emergency triage protocol that includes an online calculator to help decide who gets life-saving care and who does not, I have to say that this is a turning point. The protocol has been distributed to hospitals. People who know better than all of us see what's coming their way, and there are ethical decisions that are going to be made in our hospitals because we have not put measures in place to keep people safe and to protect workers in the province of Ontario.

Given all that we know, Speaker, and all that the people of this province were expecting from this budget, this budget, unfortunately, in this third wave of the pandemic, missed the mark. It's actually continuing a theme that we've seen often from this government: They've significantly missed opportunities to address this wave of COVID-19, to address ongoing inequities that have existed in this province, many left over from the last government. For those who have already been struggling, the message is to continue struggling. For those who benefited, like the big box stores, the government has their back, but for those on the front line, the message is, "You're on your own."

They had an opportunity to keep people safe strategically with measures like paid sick days. Workers need support as infections spread, new variants develop and the vaccination process rolls out, and that vision is not here.

I want to be really clear: Vaccinations are not going well in the province of Ontario, and I spoke about that this morning in a member's statement with respect to Niagara. Nobody in this province thinks that the government of the

day is handling the vaccination rollout with competency, with accuracy and addressing the inequities that exist across the province.

1640

I think that the sense of frustration across the province is not just because of a shortage of vaccines, and this really isn't the time or place to be pointing fingers at the federal government in a blame game or a deflection, which is often what seems to be happening. There are 700,000 vaccines in freezers at last count. We need to get them in the arms of Ontarians. All of us want that. Understanding where the barriers are in this rollout is an important part of solving the problem.

I thought the member from Ottawa South raised an interesting point: With all the indications of future spending over three, five, 10 or 20 years in this budget, where is the consideration for public health and the possible future where we will need more vaccines, possibly a year from now? There should certainly be a multi-year plan for the future for vaccines.

Education is the area where I think a lot of people were very surprised in this budget, with actual cuts at this time. Education is something that people in this province are deeply passionate about. Just last week, the Ottawa Citizen reported that Ontario schools hit a record high of new COVID-19 cases among students and staff: "Ontario publicly funded schools had 1,147 new laboratory-confirmed cases the week of March 22-26, passing the previous record of 999 cases in the week before schools closed for the holiday break in December," when the government was telling people to go Christmas shopping so that big box stores could deal with their inventory.

Diego Bassani, a scientist and epidemiologist at SickKids hospital, "found that the incidence of COVID-19 among students studying in person at Ontario schools is now higher than rates in the community," which was described as very concerning. Despite this, in the budget the government is ending almost all COVID-related support, as my friend the education critic has often pointed out.

We heard from many school boards and people in the education sector on what they hoped to see in this year's budget. In my community of Niagara, the chair of the school board of Niagara told the committee, "We know that the road ahead will be challenging. We need to address learning gaps and provide extra supports for students in various forms. The financial pressures are real. And they will continue well into the future." He goes on to say, "Pandemic-related funding pressures for school boards are monumental and in order to help alleviate these pressures, I would like to stress the importance of responsive and flexible education funding for school boards." Additionally, "having a funding mechanism that protects school boards from a decline in enrolment will be extremely important." That is missing in this budget, Speaker.

"Other important areas that need consideration"—and should have been addressed—"are:

"—continuing to allow school boards to access accumulated surplus greater than 1%;

“—funding for technology;
 “—additional funding for sick leave;
 “—a fix to inadequate transportation funding;
 “—increased funding to support the administrative overhead and commodity increases;
 “—permanent funding for mental health supports”—very, very important, and not specifically addressed;
 “—funding for human rights and equity officers;
 “—establish full secondary day school funding.”

PressProgress examined this budget, and what they found was detailed in an article entitled, “Doug Ford’s 2021 Budget Confirms Over \$1 Billion in Cuts to Education, Ontario School Boards Say.” PressProgress reports that “future spending increases will be below the rate of inflation.” Speaker, this is not a time for that to be occurring.

The government will respond and they’ll say, “Listen, this is one-time funding. This was meant for just this one year,” which assumes that the impact of this pandemic is like a one-time event, when in fact what we know is that students in our system have experienced great learning disruption over this year, whether they’re online or in the classroom.

Coming from a family with many who deal in the mental health sector, the mental health piece, the challenges that students and staff actually have felt over the course of this year, is real; it’s documented. Pulling that money out and removing resources from a system that has experienced great trauma and strain is poorly thought out. We certainly will be making the case for increased funding in the Grants for Student Needs, because that’s the major funding mechanism that schools needed, and it wasn’t here, Speaker.

Right now school board trustees are saying, “How can we minimize the damage on a go-forward basis?” And they should be feeling supported by this government. With the rising cases in our schools, with the difficulties we’re seeing in student and teacher mental health, I’m very surprised that this government would commit to ending COVID funding when we clearly still have a great challenge in front of us.

Paid sick days: I think we’ve talked about that quite a bit, Speaker, on this side of the House. I’m absolutely amazed that this government so stubbornly refuses to look at something that everyone from the medical professionals to unions to city councils and business owners have come out and said is absolutely essential, both from a public health perspective and from simply a moral perspective, so that people don’t choose between staying home with COVID-19 and infecting the community.

SEIU Healthcare has said that health care workers have been calling on the Premier to make the initial \$4-per-hour pandemic pay available to all front-line heroes fighting COVID and to make it permanent, another thing that this government has failed to do, along with an opportunity in this budget to fix what I consider to be an incredible problem in our hospitals, which is a failure to pay hospital workers for isolation pay when they have to report an

exposure and are sent home. Many have had to go without pay for weeks—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question for the member opposite is—I know we had lots of health care spending, things for families, protective equipment for businesses and manufacturers in the last budget, and the member didn’t vote for it. And in our first budget, we had a lot to spur the economy well before a pandemic, and the member voted against that one.

Now we have an opportunity for the member—again, this is a budget that creates more hospital capacity, builds more hospitals, builds more long-term care, builds more long-term-care capacity, more PPE, helps small businesses, helps a lot of families, child care centres and child care tax credits. I could go on. Will you do the right thing this time? I know that maybe previously you couldn’t support some of those great investments for many communities like yours and your colleagues’, but this time around will you be supporting it? And what particular measure do you really support?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member for the question. It’s an interesting question because I come from the health care sector, from the union side, and I’ve been dealing with the issues of front-line health care workers for many, many years. The rhetoric from the government when it comes to a budget—it’s interesting to see how that money flows down because it so often doesn’t get to the workers who need it.

Building big new hospitals—you can have a big building, but you’ve got to have people working in it to deliver health care. The lack of concern for those front-line workers is what I’ve seen during this pandemic, and what I had really hoped this government would try to address in this budget specifically, rather than just kind of grand promises—what workers need. They need to be covered when they’re sick. They need isolation pay when they have to stay home. They need real support from this government. I don’t think we saw that in this budget.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I was listening carefully to the member’s comments. I really appreciated them. I know this afternoon the member has mentioned a couple of times concerns about the lack of—the missed opportunity in this budget and, in particular, with regard to funding and support for non-profits. I wondered if the member would care to expand a little bit on what he’s found in his community in Niagara from non-profits and the issues they’ve raised with him and their concerns. I think we’d like to bring those voices here to the Legislature.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my colleague from Davenport for that question. Coming from the not-for-profit sector as well—before being elected to this House, I was the executive director of a not-for-profit agency—I think what often goes unsaid is, even compared to private enterprise, how effective and how efficient not-for-profits

can be. They operate on very tight budgets, not a lot of wasted money, and they're right at the very front lines of the pandemic. It's just a very cost-effective way to get help to people when they need it the most, as quickly as possible, to be supporting not-for-profits.

I was out the other day helping deliver food with Meals on Wheels out of the Welland hospital, and the executive director was telling me they haven't had a funding increase for 10 years—10 years. Here we are in the third wave of a pandemic. You have people delivering meals to seniors and they haven't had an increase for 10 years, and their numbers have doubled. That would have been an easy way for the government to get money directly to the front line.

1650

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the member from Niagara Centre for his presentation. He will know that one of the frustrations arising from COVID has been a lack of reliable, high-speed Internet and cell service to many households across the province, including Niagara Centre and in other parts of Niagara as well, due to a lack of adequate broadband infrastructure.

My colleague from Niagara Centre will know that there's an investment of \$2.8 billion in this Ontario budget. Will he be supporting that part of the budget because of the effect in the Niagara area, which has been long-standing?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member for the question. It's a good question. The House leader earlier asked one of our members what parts of the budget they would support. I was happy to see mention of broadband and also mention of mental health in the budget.

Unfortunately, with broadband, the government has put a bill forward and they've almost undermined their own bill, because in such an important issue, they've embedded something about an MZO in an area of the province, basically pushing aside any kind of consultation and due diligence. Initially, it was to put a factory on a provincially recognized wetland. Those are mixed messages for people.

It's good that there's mention of broadband in the budget, but then introducing another bill which undermines itself by talking about an MZO, which has nothing to do with broadband, really undermines the government's commitment to that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: To my colleague: I know the Premier was in Niagara this week, and I know that, for whatever reason, he decided not to invite you to participate, which I think is wrong.

He also went to a vaccine outlet in St. Catharines, and I'm never really sure whether that's your riding or somebody else's riding. What happened in Niagara—we didn't get our 5,500 Moderna vaccines. They now are admitting they were diverted; they just won't tell us why or where they went. Why do you think the government won't tell us why they never gave us our Moderna vaccines, at a time when it could have saved lives in Niagara?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to my colleague for the question. I honestly don't know an answer, so I can't say. That's a problem in itself, because you'd think that if the government had a legitimate reason—and there are all kinds of legitimate reasons I can think of, quite frankly, why some vaccine might get diverted. Perhaps it went to an area that needed it more. Perhaps it was sent there by accident. There's all kinds of legitimate reasons. I have to compliment my friend from Niagara Falls for the great work he's done pressing the government for an answer and for some transparency on the issue. But clearly, when the government doesn't want to answer, that tells me that there's not one of those legitimate issues, and that it was either a serious mistake or possibly sent somewhere for a political reason. I don't know. But if it was a legitimate reason, there would be no reason for the government not to come forward and tell us what it is.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: In my last question the member answered, he talked about nurses. I'm glad he mentioned that because in the first budget we introduced, there was lots of funding for hiring more nurses, and the member did vote against that. Not only did we do that for nurses, but also, subsequently to that—I look at the example in my own backyard, but it's happening across the province, and that is training more nurses, just like we're trying to train more PSWs, allowing them to train in places like Georgian College, which happens to be right beside Royal Victoria hospital, so just kind of creating that partnership. Now we're doing that with PSWs, and that was well before this budget. So there's been multiple occasions that the member has had an opportunity to join us along the way to support some of these job creation opportunities and support our health care sector. Now, we have this opportunity to support places like Trillium Health Partners, who spoke highly of this particular budget, and the Ontario Hospital Association, who said that this is historic financial support for hospitals. Will you support the Ontario Hospital Association in their support for this budget?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Boy, do I have an answer for that. I spent many, many years as a front-line union rep representing PSWs all across the province, and one of the most difficult parts of that job was negotiating with companies like Chartwell, where a former leader of your party is a board member.

Watching during the pandemic all kinds of dividends, millions of dollars, being paid out to shareholders while people are dying in nursing homes underlines the problem in our long-term-care system. I've negotiated with many of those companies and sat at the bargaining table, not just locally but provincially, and they are worried about their bottom line. That wage deficit that has grown and grown and grown over the years has put us in the position that we're in now, and there's nothing in this budget to fix it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I will determine that there is not enough time for questions and a response. Therefore, further debate?

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House on behalf of the wonderful community of Mississauga–Malton. This is a community that has banded together during the ongoing pandemic, with neighbours standing in solidarity with one another. I have personally witnessed many random acts of kindness: Malton Women Council arranging laptops for senior members so that they can reconnect with their loved ones; members of the Malton Black Development Association providing scholarships to local youth; organizations like Sai Dham and Seva food banks and Mount Zion church supporting the most vulnerable; Fueling Healthy Minds providing breakfast to students; community members like Angie Munick and Maranda Bacchus providing backpacks to bring smiles to those in need; and seniors' groups supporting the mental and physical health of fellow seniors. Mr. Speaker, I can say with pride that I am part of such a vibrant and caring community, and I want to say thank you to the community for that.

Mr. Speaker, we're talking about the budget. If passed, it will benefit the riding of Mississauga–Malton and communities across the province. I can assure hard-working Ontarians that the province and the elected officials that you have sent want to vanquish COVID-19 once and for all, and I'm proud to say that this budget will provide much-needed support. Every single line item in the 2021 Ontario budget is more than just words on paper. Each of these words represents hope and dreams for the communities across the province.

The budget before us delivers much-needed and well-targeted investment in the economic recovery of this province, while protecting the health of our residents so we can continue being the economic engine of this great nation.

Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that my community's small businesses, like in any of the communities across the province, have been adversely impacted by COVID-19. That's why our government has stood up time and time again and supported these local businesses, and I can give you an example.

One year ago, in April 2020, we launched Tackling the Barriers portal, a virtual tool to allow small businesses to express to their government how we could be more flexible in enabling those small businesses to navigate through COVID-19. It has resulted in multiple, tangible changes that have kept our province going, with examples including capping fees to food delivery services, helping restaurants extend outdoor patio spaces, allowing 24/7 deliveries to retail stores and hotels to ensure shelves can stay stocked around the clock, permitting after-hours construction for critical infrastructure, allowing electronic witnessing of signatures for wills and powers of attorney, and partnering up with the federal government to provide commercial rent assistance. These are some of the examples.

According to the most recent red tape report card issued by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Ontario has been getting a grade A, the highest grade the province has ever received. It is worth noting that if we

look at 2018, the previous government left us with just a C+, far behind the other provinces.

1700

I want to recognize the extensive consultations done by Minister Bethlenfalvy and PA Cho. Thank you for your hard work to engage with the whole province. Thank you for actively listening and working hard to incorporate the suggestions from stakeholders from all regions.

Speaker, we know that businesses and families alike have been through a tough time. That is why the Ontario small business grant will automatically top up a second round of \$10,000 to \$20,000. I'm pleased to share with my colleagues that \$1.44 billion has already been paid to over 100,000 businesses through the Ontario small business grant, 87% of all eligible businesses have already been paid, and 97% of all eligible applicants have been paid or are being processed.

We have seen the great success of programs like the Digital Main Street program. It allowed close to 20,000 small businesses in Ontario to expand their potential market. That is why this budget will aim to invest another \$10 million.

Mr. Speaker, the minister has said time and again—and I want to borrow this from him—that without healthy people, we cannot have a healthy economy. We understand that not every community has been impacted in the same way. That is why this budget delivers \$50 million towards a series of laser-focused, targeted measures that protect the communities most affected by COVID-19; like Peel, for instance.

Ontarians across the province are well aware of the decades of neglect and underfunding of long-term-care homes by the previous government. That is why our government is taking swift, decisive action to fix once and for all this issue for the sector. Trillium Health Partners at Speakman will build 420 new beds and upgrade 220 beds in Mississauga. I want to say thanks to the minister for giving us that support.

Peel region is also a diverse population with specialized cultural needs. That's why the budget will invest \$4.9 billion over four years to increase the average direct daily care to four hours a day in long-term care and provide the funds to hire a highly diverse batch of 27,000 new PSWs and nurses.

As the long-term-care capacity is increased and for wait-lists to decrease, we must maintain high-quality standards for seniors living in the comfort of their homes. That is why the budget is going to provide \$160 million over the next three years.

Mr. Speaker, in 2019, just prior to the pandemic, despite being only 40% of Canada's population, our beautiful province was responsible for 76% of Ontario's job growth. As the Premier always says, the government does not create jobs; it creates the optimal conditions for businesses to create jobs. That is what this budget is providing. Our policies have already had great success in placing our province on the pedestal of the top destinations for growth.

For the long-term economic recovery, our government seeks to provide \$400 million over four years to support

investments in sectors such as advanced manufacturing, technology and life sciences. This funding will allow the agency to promote all the wonderful pull factors associated with our province, including a great quality of life, a strong and growing innovation sector and a highly skilled talent pool.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about broadband. In today's world, the power of the Internet and digital highway: If the pandemic has taught us one thing, it is that the ability for homes, businesses and communities to connect to broadband is a necessity; it is not a luxury. That's what we've learned. That is why our government is going to invest \$2.8 billion so that we can have broadband in every corner of our province by 2025.

Our government is well aware of and embraces the rich economic and geographic diversity of our province. That is why we are going to be making sure to invest \$61 million into the Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit. This means a total tax credit support of \$155 million. At this critical time, when many businesses are looking to transition their operations, a doubling of the tax credit rate as proposed by this budget would create a much more attractive climate for businesses to open up shop across Ontario. This will help to make sure that the whole province progresses together.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the budget before us delivers a muscular investment into ensuring both the short-term and long-term economic and physical health of our province at a time when communities and companies are deciding how to best transition and reorient their life and operations. This budget makes a deliberate emphasis to position Ontario as the foremost destination to live, grow and make investments, while protecting people's health and our economy.

We have all worked together—all levels of government have worked together with the stakeholders, the businesses, the local partners, the residents at large—to combat COVID-19. I want to say this: Let's keep the discipline and continue to follow the local public health guidelines. We have shown how we can come together and weather the storm, and with vaccinations under way, the horizon is near. Just this week, our government reached the incredible milestone of over two million doses of COVID-19 vaccines.

At this time, I'm looking forward to colleagues on both sides joining us in supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Malton for those comments. I was listening carefully.

The member talked a lot about increased investments, but I wanted to challenge the member to explain to me how it is that under education spending, for example, the government could make a \$750-million cut compared to this year, but also how it is that this government could pretend to be increasing funding when, in fact, they're not keeping up with the rate of inflation? If he could explain to me why they refuse to actually keep up with inflation in education spending, which means it is actually, in reality,

a cut—in fact, it's more like a \$1.6-billion cut, when you take all of that into consideration.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member opposite for your advocacy for education.

I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker—I have two children. Education is of prime importance for our province. That is why our province is actually increasing the budget by \$733 million—and not just increasing the budget for the students; we are actually making sure our parents are not left alone. That is why our government is giving \$400 per every child and \$500 for children with special needs. With all this together, a small family of three kids—with the third funding, the total money they will be getting is \$2,600.

We understand the value of our children. That's why we want to invest in them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Malton. It's a great community, the great city of Mississauga—great companies, great residents, great schools and, of course, Pearson airport, the largest airport in Canada—and the city in which I was born as well. I was actually born in Mississauga Hospital.

I wanted to ask you—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Address your comments through the Chair, please.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I wanted to ask the member for Mississauga–Malton: You talked about health and safety. What's in this budget bill for community health and safety? And I'd like to learn a little bit more about the expansion of the hospital in Mississauga.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member. You've been an advocate for the community. I've got a lot of calls on this. The office where we're renting, the business owner is from your riding, and I hear good things about you.

I quickly want to touch on—I want to thank Trillium Health Partners, and my colleague Christine Hogarth, as well. We were listening to the wonderful investment our government is making for redeveloping the M section, which our member from Mississauga Centre talked about. It is an incredible investment in Mississauga, and not just in Mississauga; in the whole Peel region. Hospitals are getting redeveloped in Mississauga, and we're looking forward to another hospital in Brampton.

Mr. Speaker, our government understands the value of people's health. That's our number one priority, and we will continue to make those investments.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you to the member from Mississauga–Malton for his presentation. When the pandemic started, I can distinctly remember, a little more than a year ago, the government was going down the road of cutting public health units in Ontario from 34 to, I believe, 19, cutting well over \$1 million from the system—

Interjection: Fourteen.

1710

Mr. Jeff Burch: To 14; thank you.

Obviously, they changed course. Thank goodness the pandemic didn't happen six months later or they would have been going down that road already. But I'm wondering why, in this budget, we don't see future discussion about public health and supporting that. The member from Ottawa South brought up earlier that we could need another vaccine in a year and there could be another pandemic down the road.

There are other long-term commitments in the budget. Why did you not talk about public health and strengthening public health and putting the appropriate supports there for future vaccines?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thanks to the member opposite for that question. Again, Mr. Speaker, we have shown during COVID that our government has done incredible and required investments, and that's what we're going to continue to do. The member opposite is talking about a recommendation given by the Auditor General, and we have definitely listened to the advice of the Auditor General. But because we're going through something called a global pandemic, which has halted the whole community at large—again, I want to say this, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite: We will continue to make the required investments in the health care sector. As always, it is our number one priority to take care of the health of our residents.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? The member from—

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Markham–Thornhill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's been a long afternoon. Forgive me.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You are great.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): You know where you're from.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to my colleague from Mississauga–Malton for passionately talking about the small businesses. Small businesses are not only the backbone of our economy; they're the backbone of the community, as well. I come from the city called the "high-tech capital of Canada," Markham in the Markham–Thornhill riding. My colleague is passionately talking about small businesses and he's so excited about the budget, which is addressing small business in a big way.

I'll ask my colleague the member for Mississauga–Malton to briefly outline what our government is doing in this budget to protect the small businesses in Ontario.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Before coming into politics, I was actually a small business owner, and I understand the pain and the fruits of being a small business owner. During this pandemic, we have seen that all the small businesses had to suffer a lot. They had a reduction in their revenue, but not a reduction in their expenses. That is why the government took a decisive decision and helped the small business community through rent relief.

I want to talk about something that our government has done recently: providing the Ontario Small Business

Support Grant, a historic grant of \$10,000 to \$20,000 that no other province has provided. We understand the pain of small business, but we did not stop there. We actually have increased and doubled up this small business grant and made sure that they get it without even reapplying.

We understand that we need to remove the red tape and we understand that we need to support these small businesses. That's why, Mr. Speaker, the government of Ontario has already distributed over \$1.44 billion to 100,000-plus businesses; to be precise, it's 100,200. The Ontario small business grant includes 97% of the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further questions?

M. Guy Bourgouin: Ma question pour le député de Mississauga–Malton : l'expansion de la 11 et la 17, de Thunder Bay à Nipigon, on l'a su—ça fait une secousse qu'on a entendu—mais aussi l'expansion de la 11 et de la 17 entre la frontière du Manitoba puis Kenora. Ces deux expansions-là font part des budgets de 2017 et 2021 pour les régions du nord de l'Ontario. J'aimerais vous entendre, parce que si vous regardez entre Nipigon puis North Bay sur la route 11, il y a du monde qui vit entre ça, là—y compris le comté de Mushkegowuk, qui est dedans. Puis votre budget est silencieux sur les projets qu'on vous demande ça fait longtemps. Ce sont des routes dangereuses. Il y a du monde qui y meurt chaque année. Vous avez voté contre le projet de loi pour l'entretien des chemins que j'avais proposé. J'aimerais vous entendre sur ce que vous allez faire pour la route 11 qui est tellement dangereuse l'hiver—puis, en passant, notre hiver n'est pas fini.

Mr. Deepak Anand: When I look at Ontario, I don't look at Ontario as southern Ontario, northern Ontario; I look at Ontario as Ontario. That is why our government is committed to making sure that when we're talking about the progress, when we're talking about the investment, we're talking about investment for the whole of Ontario.

I want to talk about some of the things which our government is doing. Ontario is committed to supporting the northern economy through the COVID-19 pandemic. For an example, the government is investing \$5 million over the next two years in the new Ontario Junior Exploration Program. Your government is investing an additional \$50 million over the next two years, which will be allocated to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund. Along with that, Mr. Speaker—I said that earlier; I'm going to say that again—our government is making sure there is a Regional Opportunities Investment Tax Credit at a rate of 10%—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to rise on behalf of the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane. Every day I rise here, I'm honoured because I never expected to be here in my whole life.

It's interesting to listen to everyone speak. Today has been a very confusing day. I'd like to put on the record, as the whip, I have had to rearrange my speakers three times because each time the government changes what bill

they're talking about. Now, if they had given us some time ahead, like in the old days, it would have been much easier. I'm finding, even, that the government, itself, doesn't seem to know what we're debating. We are debating the budget bill, but the speeches I hear are about the budget motion.

For me, that's quite confusing, and I think we all need some time to reflect on that. So, for that, Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane has moved adjournment of the House. Agreed? I heard a no.

I turn back to the member of Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, no.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): No? Oh, sorry. I'm getting ahead of myself. I just got so excited that I could remember your riding. It's been a long afternoon.

All those in favour of adjournment of the House, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

There will be a bell for 30 minutes. I would ask the table to prepare the chambers.

The division bells rang from 1720 to 1750.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The vote on the motion to adjourn the House has been held.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 10; the nays are 6.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1751.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Tonia Grannum, Valerie Quioc Lim, William Short,
Peter Sibenik, William Wong
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

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Blais, Stephen (LIB)	Orléans	
Bouma, Will (PC)	Brantford—Brant	
Bourgouin, Guy (NDP)	Mushkegowuk—James Bay / Mushkegowuk—Baie James	
Burch, Jeff (NDP)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	
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Cho, Stan (PC)	Willowdale	
Clark, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (PC)	Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes / Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands et Rideau Lakes	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Collard, Lucille (LIB)	Ottawa—Vanier	
Coteau, Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Crawford, Stephen (PC)	Oakville	
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Fee, Amy (PC)	Kitchener South—Hespeler / Kitchener-Sud—Hespeler	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Waterloo	

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French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Parm (PC)	Milton	
Glover, Chris (NDP)	Spadina—Fort York	
Gravelle, Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Première vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Hardeman, Hon. / L'hon. Ernie (PC)	Oxford	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
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Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hassan, Faisal (NDP)	York South—Weston / York-Sud—Weston	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor—Tecumseh	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
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Kanapathi, Logan (PC)	Markham—Thornhill	
Karahalios, Belinda C. (NBP)	Cambridge	
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Ke, Vincent (PC)	Don Valley North / Don Valley-Nord	
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Kusendova, Natalia (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	
Lecce, Hon. / L'hon. Stephen (PC)	King—Vaughan	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Lindo, Laura Mae (NDP)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
MacLeod, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa (PC)	Nepean	Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries / ministre des Industries du patrimoine, du sport, du tourisme et de la culture
Mamakwa, Sol (NDP)	Kiiwetinoong	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est—Stoney Creek	
Mitas, Christina Maria (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Monteith-Farrell, Judith (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Morrison, Suze (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

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Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
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Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
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Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
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Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa- Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Hon. / L'hon. Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Colleges and Universities / Ministre des Collèges et Universités
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction / Ministre associé délégué au dossier des Petites Entreprises et de la Réduction des formalités administratives Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (LIB)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurratan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
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Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
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Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Associate Minister of Energy / Ministre associé de l'Énergie Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

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Randy Hillier, Jane McKenna
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Michael Parsa
Randy Pettapiece, Donna Skelly
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
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**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
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Chair / Président: Gilles Bisson
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Gilles Bisson
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Wayne Gates, Robin Martin
Norman Miller, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lucille Collard
Will Bouma, Lucille Collard
Parm Gill, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Kaleed Rasheed, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Taras Natyshak
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Jessica Bell, Stephen Blais
Stephen Crawford, Rudy Cuzzetto
France Gélinas, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Taras Natyshak
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Logan Kanapathi
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Fraser
Will Bouma, John Fraser
Logan Kanapathi, Vincent Ke
Laura Mae Lindo, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Jeremy Roberts
Dave Smith, Daisy Wai
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Bhutila Karpoche
Deepak Anand, Aris Babikian
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Mike Harris, Christine Hogarth
Belinda C. Karahalios, Bhutila Karpoche
Natalia Kusendova
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tanzima Khan

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

Chair / Président: Daryl Kramp
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Tom Rakocevic
Robert Bailey, Gilles Bisson
John Fraser, Christine Hogarth
Daryl Kramp, Robin Martin
Sam Oosterhoff, Lindsey Park
Tom Rakocevic, Sara Singh
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell