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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 17 August 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 17 août 2022

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STRONG MAYORS,
BUILDING HOMES ACT, 2022
LOI DE 2022 POUR DES MAIRES FORTS
ET POUR LA CONSTRUCTION
DE LOGEMENTS

Continuation of debate on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 3, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to special powers and duties of heads of council / Projet de loi 3, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les pouvoirs et fonctions spéciaux des présidents du conseil.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Further debate?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It is a distinct honour to be able to rise today in the House on behalf of the residents of St. Catharines. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of the residents of St. Catharines who have entrusted me to be their member of provincial Parliament and represent them, to be their voice for the 43rd Parliament.

At this time also, Speaker, I would like to thank my team, my husband, my mother, my daughter, my son and all of my family for supporting me during the last election—and Gatesy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Sorry; you have to address members by their riding.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Oh. Thank you, Speaker.

It is also a distinct honour to be able to speak on Bill 3, Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act. There's actually no part of this bill that speaks of housing. This makes this a questionable bill to most residents, not only in St. Catharines but all across Ontario. In fact, it gives mayors, particularly in Toronto and in Ottawa, the ability to override their very own duly elected council members and override local bylaws.

The question asked of me time and time again from residents of my riding is, are we not in the midst of a housing crisis, an affordable housing crisis? It is an emergency. And may I answer that? Yes, of course we are, we definitely are.

Housing shortages and high demand, whether in terms of rentals or homes for sale, is a real issue Ontarians are trying to survive through. When this government talks about building more homes for families, we can all admit

that it sounds hopeful. It kind of sounds like a government who is listening to the needs of Ontarian constituents. However, when you investigate and you strip apart this bill and you read this bill through and through, you will realize that this bill is not about building homes at all—at least not in a tangible, boots-on-the-ground kind of way.

Within the strong-mayors bill, it seems like the outside of this bill is building more homes; however, it is really only about giving more powers to the chair or the head of elected officials. Similar to the bill on reducing red tape, this bill only promoted secrecy. It promoted a municipal government that, at the end of the day, can now do whatever they please. Mayors will be able to override the decision of their own council members. It also says that they will be able to empower the heads of council to hire and fire the chief administrative officer and any divisional heads, except for the clerk, treasurer, police and fire chief, chief building official, medical officer of health—which is a good thing—ombudsman and auditor general, subject to regulations. Subject to regulations?

Speaker, mayors will be able to override the decision of their own council members with this bill, all because they simply do not agree with their council or with the voice of the residents that the councillors are bringing forward. This is not only a very undemocratic process. This could also be a very slippery slope and could be dangerous and precedent-setting for democracy at the cost of handcuffing the government that is actually the closest government to our residents within our ridings, within Ontario.

As a city councillor for the city of St. Catharines for well over 17 years, I know the ins and the outs of municipal politics—at least I kind of think I do. For 17 years, I was elected by the residents of St. Catharines in the Merritton ward. I and my 11 other councillors knew when we were in the chambers voting on motions that our vote would count and that we could rely on the fact that the mayor—or the mayors that I sat under—of the time would not go over our heads simply because they did not agree with what we were bringing forward around the horseshoe. They never had the powers to strip us from a democratic debate, of a decision that we were making strictly for the residents within our ward. Debates and voices are what the democratic process is all about—consultation, which this bill does not do.

Consultation is what the democratic process is all about. Not weakening the process of being the voices, the insights as councillors. Several times throughout my time on council, I did not agree with every motion that was put on the floor, or put forward, or that was on the floor, as I said. However, I was a voice for 145,000 residents within

the city of St. Catharines. I was their voice. I could bring their voice to the horseshoe. I could debate what their concerns were. It was their concerns that were being brought forward and they were at the forefront of everyone's minds. And a fulsome debate was, and is, always healthy for the residents so that they can be heard. This is why we met with relevant stakeholders, as well.

Speaker, what this bill tells us is that no matter what happens in consultation and debate, at the end of the day, mayors will have the ability to outright override whatever concerns are brought to the forefront of the minds for the residents. Quite frankly, this bill is just not democratic. It is stripping the residents within the cities across Ontario of the rights to take interest in their communities, to bring important issues to their councillors, to make sure their voice is heard, in the fear that the mayor will not agree or could and will have the powers to overturn the vision of what a councillor is bringing forward for our Ontario residents.

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When we demand answers from this government, when Ontarians demand answers from this government, is this the only solution they can offer, by bringing this forward, when Ontarians are shouting from the rooftops that they are going to be homeless if this government does not do something about the astronomical rent prices? Listen to our younger generations, that dream of home ownership. The dream of home ownership is only something they've totally given up on because it's too far out of their reach to be able to afford.

This government's response to Ontarians, our next generation, is a bill about giving mayors more power. What is that showing our next generation? This government's response to Ontarians, our next generation—imagine, giving mayors more power. Ontarians did not ask for this. Frankly, this bill isn't a solution to affordable housing at all. It's something, in some sense, to distract people with.

I ask the people of St. Catharines, I am asking the residents of Ontario, I'm going to ask you: If you were being threatened with an eviction or you weren't able to secure a place to call your own because of housing markets right now, would your idea of a solution be to meddle in municipal politics? I think I can answer it for the people, at least for the people that I have spoken to: absolutely not.

An ideal solution is to build more affordable housing—that's a solution—not just million-dollar homes in neighbourhoods with not even one affordable housing unit. It is as simple as that. This government should make affordable homes their top priority, just like it is a chance to do something about affordable housing right now. It's not too late. Also, it's not something to be ignored.

This government is actively choosing to do nothing about affordable housing within this bill. I question that. I do not see the mention of the word "housing" or "building homes" in the bill. This seems like it should be common sense.

I would like to finish up with my words to ask this government, when you're empowering the local government mayors of Ottawa and Toronto, to make sure that we

are looking at building affordable housing within our communities. This is what the residents of St. Catharines are looking for. This is what the residents of Ontario are looking for. They need to make sure that when we're building houses, we're cutting that red tape, we're taking away the government's yellow tape—caution tape—and making sure that they will be able to afford to live within their communities. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Questions and answers.

Hon. Stan Cho: I suppose I did ask for debate to be extended this afternoon, so here it is.

I listened very carefully. That's the third time the opposition, this afternoon, has mentioned the mention of the word "housing," as if success can be somehow defined by mentioning housing. If that was the case, let's just put it in the bill a million and a half times and hope that the problem solves itself. But the reality is that talk is cheap. Talk is very cheap.

We have a supply and demand imbalance that's only going to get worse with the growing population. When you trace back the root of the backlog of the supply to the market, you'll see that oftentimes it is the very problem we are addressing in this bill: that municipalities are choked against getting that very supply out.

My question to the member opposite is simple: Is it more important to mention housing, or is it more important to actually enable the municipalities to build that housing?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It is so important to mention housing, especially affordable housing, may I say, because people, when I went door to door, were saying that it all falls under an umbrella, especially in St. Catharines, where affordable housing has been so ignored for over four years—five years now, plus the 20 years from the other government. It has been ignored.

By saying you're reducing red tape to make sure that you can build million-dollar homes that our next generation cannot afford—that's not the answer either. The answer is to make sure you have some kind of policy in place so that we can have affordable housing, so everyone has a roof over their head, that they can afford to live in their in their own neighbourhood.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Speaker, through you, I'd like to thank the member from St. Catharines for her presentation. I gathered from her presentation that housing seems to be almost an afterthought. It's almost as though the strong-mayor legislation was drafted and this add-on is the distraction. It's like the sugar on top to mask the foul taste of what this actually represents.

My question to the member is, why do you suppose this government and this Premier are ignoring calls from the big city mayors group to have a meeting?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague for that wonderful question. I can't answer for the government. They haven't answered the questions throughout this whole election of any resident in my riding because they didn't show up to any debates. I've heard it from ridings across Niagara, across Ontario and many of my colleagues on this side of the House: The government,

while going through the election, did not show up at any debates. So it doesn't surprise me that they're not answering the questions of mayors or regional chairs or they're not addressing the real issues that are across Ontario right now, especially in the ridings that are being brought forward today. They're not bringing those key issues: homelessness, addiction, mental health. They're not bringing those forward. I would like to see those in this bill, but we're just seeing the government empowering the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa and not building homes in 2022, as it states on the title of this bill. Strip it down further—not a word about housing or affordable housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Questions?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Speaking of specific language in the bill, since the member for St. Catharines didn't quote any provision in the bill in her prepared remarks that she read, I wonder if referencing the specific language in section 226.9, specifically subsections (9), (10) and (11)—the reason I ask is that those subsections, referring to bylaws in reference to, among other legislation, the Planning Act, reference the word “override” not in relation to the powers proposed for mayors, but in relation to the ability of council, by a two-thirds democratic vote, to override the mayor's decision on a bylaw. Did the member opposite consider that language?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: To the member opposite: no.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Questions?

The member from Niagara West.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Oh, my God.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Niagara Falls?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Falls.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You've been there, drinking wine, how many times?

To my colleague over here, the reason why it's important to mention housing is because that's the name of the bill. It's got “building housing”—just a thought on that.

I'd like to congratulate the member from St. Catharines on being re-elected again and again and again. Congratulations on that.

This entire bill is about power, power, power. That's all it's about. It's about power for—I'm not sure who the real Premier is, which one of these two guys is the Premier. I'm not sure which one.

Toronto agrees with Bill 3—who is a Tory, and his name is Tory, so there's no confusion there. Yet the Ottawa mayor said no to Bill 3. In Niagara, that same question was asked to the three biggest mayors, of St. Catharines, Welland and Niagara Falls. They say they do not support the bill.

Nothing in this bill implements even a single recommendation of the government's own Housing Affordability Task Force, which makes no sense. So my question is really easy, quite frankly: Why are the majority of the mayors saying no to this power-grabbing bill?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to my colleague from Niagara Falls. What a wonderful question.

Actually, it's a great question. Why are the mayors saying no to this bill? Because they see within it that it is not going to help with the emergency crisis that we're in right now with our health care, which is at its knees. It's at the brink of its knees right now because of Bill 124 and our workers who are trying so hard to get out of COVID-19.

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Our whole province is trying to recover from COVID-19, a pandemic that struck them so fast. Our housing shortage is high in demand. We have a mental health crisis, an emergency crisis in mental health, in addictions. I don't see why it is so important two months before a municipal election that we have to be empowering mayors with more powers to be able to maybe handcuff, may I say, your municipal councillors to a decision to be able to help the residents—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: To my colleague, thank you very much for your comments. Housing has been so vital, especially in our neighbourhood where I live. In my first election as municipal councillor in 2014 in the town of Tecumseh, it was already apparent that housing supply was needed. Seniors had to leave town and leave their families to find a place to live—young families, likewise.

During this time, several housing projects near my municipality were sent to the Ontario Land Tribunal for hearings, despite satisfying the provincial policy statement and meeting the technical requirements laid out by the municipality and had municipal administrative support. The reality that we faced was the culmination of years of Liberal governments supported by the NDP.

Our government is working diligently with our large municipal partners to build more homes and provide them with new tools necessary to achieve results. Does the opposition recognize that the province needs to be part of the solution in ensuring that we can plan for growth?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: Thank you to the member opposite. I'm glad to hear that he was a municipal councillor for a short term, I imagine. And welcome. I know that you're a new MPP here in the House, but I've never propped up the Liberals in this House, I'll have you know that, and I never will, but I will let you know that your government, the Conservative government, for 15 years, was the official opposition and propped up the Liberal government. So when you say that I'm the NDP government that propped up—we haven't been government for 30 years. I'm sorry I have to do a little history lesson here in the House, Speaker, through you.

However, in answering that, affordable housing across Ontario is needed—no doubt about it. We all heard it. If you would have shown up at some debates, maybe you would have heard it too, but we are in a complete crisis here in Ontario. What are you going to do about it?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Dave Smith): Order, please. Further debate?

Ms. Doly Begum: It's always an honour and a privilege to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the good

people of Scarborough Southwest, especially on issues of housing.

I'm an optimistic person. Whenever the government brings out a bill, even though I've had four years of lessons now, I still think when I look at the name, maybe this time they'll get it right. So when you look at a bill that has the word "housing," a lot of us, especially a lot of constituents in Scarborough Southwest and across Scarborough, become very interested because they want to be able to live in affordable homes, something that people are—you know, there is a provincial outcry and, across the country, there are a lot of different provinces that are facing this.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Then build them—can't live in them if they're not built.

Ms. Doly Begum: I would appreciate, Speaker, if the member would allow my constituents' voices to be heard—I know he likes heckling and enjoys that—but we're talking about something that's very important. We're talking about housing. We're talking about people's ability to even live in this province.

When I look at this bill—and I've heard colleagues from our side talk about it, and I think the member from Algoma-Manitoulin actually went through the different schedules of this bill. Today, as I debate Bill 3, I know that a lot of people are in the gallery today and are watching because it's of so much importance to them. This is An Act to amend various statutes with respect to special powers and duties of heads of council, and what the title that this government has actually given this is that this is a bill that creates housing. The most interesting part about this is the idea of municipal affairs and housing—you would think that there is something in this bill that has to do with housing—let alone affordable housing or supportive housing, but just housing.

To my surprise, to everyone's surprise, when we look at the schedules, first of all, almost every one of them—the first two schedules start with the word "power," and every one of them actually goes about how it's going to increase or change the power structure of municipal mayors and what that will do in terms of the structure that you're changing from actually giving mayors, who are accountable to the people of the city—because mayors get a lot more votes than even the Premier does. I'm sure a lot of us remember that and know this. Even Premier Ford does not get the same amount of votes that, let's say, Mayor Tory receives when he runs for an election, because it's by direct vote from the entire city, so it's hundreds of thousands of votes. He's accountable to the people of the city. But instead, we're actually changing legislation now in this House to change that structure so that the mayor is accountable, through this, to the province.

When I look at this, Speaker, and I see—what is the purpose of it? What is the reason why we're doing this? If you look at it, and talking about the importance of local democracy, it is mind-boggling to see the way you're changing the structure in the name of building more homes and building more affordable homes, because we know that this has nothing to do with building more affordable homes. It doesn't even mention the word "housing." It

doesn't even mention the word "homes." It doesn't even mention the words "affordable homes" beyond this title.

I can't even tell you, during the past four years, the amount of people I have had the opportunity to meet who are devastated because of the current situation they're in. The need for housing just cannot be overstated. Just before I came into the House, I was talking to a constituent, whose wife—and the constituent actually visited our constituency office just a few days ago. He has been diagnosed with an illness, and they're in a really difficult situation. They've been waiting for their housing application for a very long time. This is the case for so many people—so many—not just in my riding. I know that it's in people's ridings across the aisle as well. There are families that I have spoken about before. There are families with eight people that are sharing one or two bedrooms and have been on the wait-list for years and years.

There are seniors living with chronic illnesses. Just the other day, a constituent came back and said, "They didn't qualify me, because the doctor said that I might die in two years and, therefore, it's not a crisis enough for me to get housing." Speaker, that's the reality that we face. Imagine being told, when you have a chronic illness and being a senior and you cannot afford to pay your rent and you've been on the wait-list for more than a decade, "You know what? Even though your doctor's note says you might die and you've been diagnosed, you're still not high enough on the list because we've got so many people on that list"—on the crisis list, not just the regular list. That's how many people we have.

We've got people who are survivors of domestic violence. I've got constituents who are living in shelters. It's an extremely difficult situation, especially when they live in shelters with children. They're waiting and waiting and waiting months and months and years, trying to figure out what to do. The children are growing up in shelters because they do not have housing.

If we're going to actually talk about housing and have the Ministry of Municipal Affairs focus on housing, why not provide the funding that we need? Why not provide the type of housing that we need? Why not build more co-op housing, something I love talking about all the time? I've seen the proof. I have seen how successful that model has been, co-operative housing. Let's build more co-operative housing. Let's fix the problems that we already have in our systems.

1600

My colleague from Humber River-Black Creek talked about the issue that we have in so many of the homes that are empty, that are vacant. But people can't afford the rent there. I know that the member from Markham-Thornhill talked about his son, I believe. I know that the Algoma-Manitoulin member talked about another young person who is thinking of buying a home, who wants to live here, who wants to afford a life in this province, but they can't, Speaker. Because it's almost impossible to afford rent, let alone dream of owning your own home. Why don't we have clauses, why don't we have schedules that actually address these problems? How are we making homes more

affordable? How are we making housing more affordable? How are we making sure that people are able to afford rent when we have empty homes that people cannot afford to buy or people cannot afford to rent? That is the inherent problem, and how are we going to fix that? Does this bill do any of that? No. But is it called “housing?” Yes, it’s called “housing,” which is just—it’s unbelievable how this government comes up with these titles that have nothing to do with the actual bill.

I want to wrap up with a few of the comments because it’s not just me; there are people across this province that are looking at this bill and it’s astounding to them, especially when they have been in municipal councils, they have been mayors in the past. These are people who have come from different party lines. It’s not just about the NDP or the Conservatives, but there are people who come from different party lines who have spoken out. So I want to point out what—and I know that this has been quoted by some of my colleagues, as well. I want to quote what Mayor Jim Watson has said about this bill: “I don’t see a need to give certain mayors more powers and veto power over duly elected councillors.”

I want to just pause on this, because when we talk about councillors—who are elected members, by the way—who represent individual ridings, individual wards like us, you’re taking away power from somebody who is elected in their own area, in their own wards, and then you’re undermining that local democracy we have—and we know how busy the councillor offices are, because that’s the direct contact they have when we talk about day-to-day issues.

What mayor Jim Watson said that this bill does nothing to do that—not only that: “What we have in place now, while imperfect, does create a system of checks and balances between the mayor and council. I would urge the government to not proceed.”

I will finish up with just one more—and this is a good one, because we have got mayors David Crombie, Barbara Hall, Art Eggleton, David Miller and John Sewell—people from all different party lines—and this is what they said about Bill 3: that this bill “risks ending meaningful democratic local government” in Toronto and Ottawa.

Speaker, I know that my time is up, so I want to thank you for your time to let me speak to this and say that this is a bill that does nothing for housing but, rather, undermines democracy. Thank you very much.

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

Further debate? The member for Renfrew–Nipissing—*Interjection.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Oh, I’m sorry. I understood that we were in questions and answers, so I’ll invite questions for the member. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke can lead off.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for Scarborough Southwest for her speech today. She goes on and on about, “We need to build this housing, co-operative housing, affordable housing.” She wants build, build, build. And I know I might sound repetitive, but every time

there’s an opportunity to build and there’s a proposal to build, there’s always somebody who is against it. And you know who will join up with them immediately?

Hon. Todd Smith: The no democratic party.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The no democratic party. They will be right there, standing with them. “We can’t do this, that’s wrong. Don’t build it here, don’t build, don’t build.” If we can’t build, you won’t get that affordable housing, you won’t get that co-operative housing, you’ll get no reduced rental housing, because in order to have housing, you’ve got to build it. So you people really have to figure out who you are. Do you believe in building housing for the people of the future that we’re going to need in this province, or do you continue to want to stand in the way of good, sound development planning so that we can build a million and a half homes, so that we can build rental units for those who either choose not to own a home or can’t afford it. But if we don’t build them, they’re not going to have them. Please, figure out who the New Democrats are.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much to the member. You know what? I want to tell the member: Bring a bill that is actually about building affordable homes; I’ll be the first in line to vote for it. Bring me a bill that is about affordable housing and I will make sure—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The member for Scarborough Southwest must be able to respond to the question that’s been asked, and I have to be able to hear her.

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you Speaker. But this bill, does it do anything that this member has stated? I know he spun it very well, but does it actually do what we’ve asked, Mr. Speaker? No, it doesn’t, and let me tell you why.

When I look at the bill and schedule 1, all of the sections start with “powers respecting,” “powers respecting,” “powers respecting”—powers to everything.

Let’s look at the second section, schedule 2:

“1. Powers respecting the chief administrative officer....

“2. Powers respecting the organizational structure....

“3. Powers respecting the local boards....”

I know my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin has done a great job pointing that out, but does this bill do anything for building affordable houses, making sure that we have those different types of houses that I talked about? No, it doesn’t. So, you know what? That’s why I can’t support it, because you cannot have a bill where the name does not really reflect the actual content of that bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to thank my colleague from Scarborough Southwest for her elegant words and speaking about the important issues that are really facing most Ontarians today, which is affordable housing.

The Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022, really doesn’t address anything about homes. Actually when I was reading through, it says something about vetoing council bylaws if the head of council believes those bylaws interfere with a prescribed provincial priority.

In St. Catharines we have vacant lands where the old GM property is. It's got all kinds of chemicals on it. We can't build on it, but the developer that's trying to build on it and trying to do all the right things by council bylaws, may I say, actually can't because this government has not supplied St. Catharines with transportation hubs. Apparently, you have to have a transportation hub around affordable housing before you can say a provincial priority can be in effect.

I'm wondering, from my member from Scarborough Southwest, would it be important to have a provincial priority? What detrimental effects could it have if the head of council vetoes the bylaws that council has put forward so that we can put provincial priorities forward?

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for her comments. I know that she has represented her community for years now and cares for how people have access to housing. You've actually highlighted something very unique, which is exactly the point of our debate today. When we talk about the issues that people are facing in this province, does the bill address any of that? No. Instead, it's giving this veto power, which is schedule 1, number 7, and it does not allow—this is a quote that I was talking about from Ottawa's mayor, which is about how it undermines local councillors' authorities as well. We know that in the city of Toronto, for example, we have councillors in individual areas, just like all of us who are elected who represent their constituents. So not only does it not address the issue, but it also undermines what we have, the structure that we have.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener–Conestoga next.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Speaker. Listen, I'm going to dial down the rhetoric. I can't believe I'm going to say that. Coming out of my mouth, that sounds a bit crazy—

Mr. John Yakabuski: What?

Hon. Todd Smith: You've changed.

1610

Mr. Mike Harris: I know. It's very strange.

But I want to ask the member from Scarborough Southwest a very simple question. I think there are some misconceptions about this bill.

I see you laughing, Speaker. It's kind of funny.

When we look at talking about overriding or vetoing, at the end of the day we're all here for the same reason. We want to see more housing built here. We want to see more affordable housing, more attainable housing, more meet-in-the-middle housing, and single family homes as well. That's also very important.

But, at the end of the day, if you've got a council that is standing in the way of building affordable housing, do you not believe that it should be the mayor's responsibility to go ahead and make sure that that housing is going to be built? Or if, vice versa, you have a mayor that's standing in the way, you have two thirds of council that can then override the mayor and make sure that that housing is going to be built. Why would you stand here and disagree and not support that?

Ms. Doly Begum: One thing I have to agree on with this member is that we are all here to represent our communities. I think, at the end of the day, we want the best for our communities. I truly believe that—all sides, all members across the aisle. That's why we have a healthy debate. Whether we oppose, at the end of the day we want to make sure that we're representing our communities. For that, I salute every single member who works hard to make sure that we're representing the wishes of our constituents.

When I look at this, I wish that what you're saying was the case when it comes to this bill, about building these homes. But when I don't even see the word "housing" or "homes," but you call it about housing, that's when I have some issues taking your word for it.

Because, like I said, every single ward is represented by a councillor. So, yes, there are times when you have a councillor that you disagree with. There are times you have a councillor that you agree with. The same thing goes for mayors. You can have people who come with different values and different ideas. But when we're talking about giving a tremendous amount of power to specific mayors and then you do not have the real content in the bill to say, "Here is how we're going to build affordable housing and address the crisis that we're facing," that's when I find that this bill falls short in addressing actually that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we have the member for Algoma–Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I want to thank the member from Scarborough Southwest for her comments that she brought to the floor.

Again, I want to go back to the importance of having proper consultation. Although right now it's stated that the act is, at the present time, going to affect, designate and go ahead with Toronto, and then further designate Ottawa, there again I want to bring this up: There are many other communities who are asking questions as those designated powers are imposed to mayors. Certain mayors aren't going to get those certain powers because, if you look at secondary or depending on the tier you're in, although you have the title of mayor, you may not have the ability to make that decision either. They don't know the answer to that question. Will they? Won't they?

Again, I want to ask the members, what would have been the benefit of having extensive consultation, proper discussions, whether it's going to be at committee stage—if you look at the history of this government, we're going to get to committee. This will get there. It's not an "if" this is going to pass; it's "when" it's going to pass by this government. Will there be extensive discussion and consultation at large with mayors across this province and communities, and what would be the benefit of it?

Ms. Doly Begum: Thank you very much to the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for his comments and for his question. At the heart of all of it is the ability to have those consultations.

I remember working with the Wasaga municipal councillors and the mayor, and what happened when they tried to sell off Wasaga Distribution, and how the councillors fought back and won that fight. Imagine having a mayor

like that, who actually wanted to just whip through and do whatever they wanted.

I also see the value in consultation in local communities—like in my riding, for example—when it comes to development, so we can have these conversations. The important of consultation cannot be overstated.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: It's a pleasure to be back here in the Ontario Legislature to serve in the 43rd Parliament. I wanted to congratulate you, of course, on your re-election as Speaker. To all the new folks here, welcome. To everyone who is coming back as part of the 43rd Parliament, congratulations to everyone.

With that, I move now that the question be put. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the House to come to order.

Mr. Harris has moved that the question be now put. I understand that second reading of this bill has now consumed eight hours and 57 minutes. The total number of members who have spoken is 24. I'm satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House. 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 will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, this vote will be deferred until after question period tomorrow.

Vote deferred.

PLAN TO BUILD ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2022
LOI DE 2022 POUR FAVORISER
LE DÉVELOPPEMENT
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on August 11, 2022, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 2, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I would like to congratulate all members on their recent re-elections. It's an honour for me to rise and add the voices of the great people of London North Centre in speaking about this government's values—its budget. You see, a budget really speaks to what the government's priorities are, but also its values, what it sees as important, what it wants to make sure it has moving forward. And in this document, we see a great deal of things that are missing. In my role as the critic for economic development, job creation and trade, I want to make sure that we are offering this government sage counsel, wise advice. As I take a look at this budget itself, I will take a look through the schedules and then point out our recommendations from this side of the House, things

that need to be improved, things that need to be enhanced, things that this government may have missed but certainly need to be implemented at this time in Ontario's history.

When we first look at this budget itself, it was the campaign document for this government. It was initially penned and released in April 2022, and we really don't see that many substantive improvements to the bill at this time. When this bill was written, our health care system wasn't in the crisis that it is now. Over the last number of months, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of ER rooms that are closing, the number of staff who are leaving the profession, our wonderful nurses who are simply burned out and can't take it anymore. So this budget needs some tremendous improvements.

As we take a look at each schedule, schedule 1 first discusses the City of Toronto Act and will allow the TTC to enter into an agreement allowing another municipality or local board to operate or maintain a transit system.

Schedule 2 looks at the Insurance Act. It will require insurers to provide the CEO of FSRA or an agency designated by the CEO with certain information about automobile insurance fraud for the purpose of assessing and detecting fraud. Now, we know that this is moving forward with the government's agenda to crack down on fraud, but insurance industry experts have not indicated whether this will actually be successful or not.

Schedule 3 concerns the Ontario Capital Growth Corporation Act; schedule 4, the Ontario Loan Act; schedule 5, the Taxation Act; and then schedule 6, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, which is a great concern or a great benefit for those in my riding of London North Centre.

1620

During this election, this government made a commitment to move the WSIB headquarters to London. While I may have some concerns about this budget and I may have concerns about things that are missing, I must unequivocally state that I am very much in favour of moving the WSIB headquarters to London. It will be such a benefit for our great city. I know that the government members, should the opposition decide not to vote for this legislation, if improvements are not made, will certainly try to say that I voted against the WSIB, but I'm here to state on the record that I'm very much in favour of the WSIB being located in London.

As we take a look at this, our health care crisis was our first mention. I want to discuss the opinions and the viewpoints of some people who have taken a look at this budget and make sure that they are entered into the record. We also saw that from Navigator, for instance. They took an overview of the budget. They said, "With all the talk about inflation and cost of living, one important commitment missing from this fourth-year budget is the middle-class income tax cut promised by PCs on the 2018 campaign trail." That's from a conservative think tank, Navigator. That was a promise that was made and a promise that was not kept.

CUPE Ontario has indicated that this budget does not take into account inflation that is exploding. It's at 8.1% at this current stage, and yet we still have the legislation of

Bill 124, which caps nurses' wages at 1%. So you are actively telling nurses that they should take a cut of up to 7%.

We saw emergency closures across the province. Fred Hahn says, "When circumstances change for the worse, the people of Ontario need a government that is responsive and responsible by altering its plans. If an architect heard that the landscape they were planning to build on was shakier than expected, they'd draft up a blueprint with stronger foundations." I couldn't agree more. We see that this budget is not responsive to our current situation. It's not responsive to our health care system that is in crisis.

During the throne speech itself, which outlined this government's priorities, our Lieutenant Governor mentions that there would be "targeted investments that strengthen Ontario's competitive advantage." But a targeted investment is in health care. A targeted investment is to pay nurses what they deserve. Repeal Bill 124. Let nurses bargain collectively. Let them receive what they are worth and give them that right rather than take it away with Bill 124.

We also have people raising alarm bells, and this government doesn't seem to want to listen. Temp agencies are dramatically on the rise right now, supplying nurses, who are desperately needed in our health care system. We see with these temporary nurses that hospitals are spending—and this is outrageous, Speaker—550% more in this last fiscal year, compared to previous years. That should give this government pause. That should let them know that more needs to be done. To do so, repeal Bill 124.

Experts have pointed out that this is a stopgap and this shows the dysfunction that is happening within Ontario's hospitals. Earlier, we heard claims from this government about how many new nurses had been attracted to the field, but they haven't also disclosed how many have left, what the rate of attrition is, how many have retired or how many have chosen to leave the profession altogether because it is simply too much.

A grave concern as well is that this is opening the door to health care privatization. That is something that, on this side of the House, we remain steadfastly concerned about. Proponents of cutting, proponents of watching the budget will always say privatization is a way to keep costs under control. It will provide greater choice, is the claim that is often made, that there will be competition. But we saw what happened in long-term care.

Yet in this budget, we don't see any investments in that either. Linda Silas, the president of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, said, "We will not be able to sustain our health care system.... These are public dollars going to private agencies." And she has an entreaty for this government. She says you're taking money and you're throwing it down the drain. Instead of doing that, instead of allowing these temporary nurses to be employed, you should be investing in nurses. You should be investing in the health care system. You should be buttressing it and trying to save it right now because it is at the brink. Yet we don't see that in this budget.

We also have the numbers, even though the government has been reluctant to provide them. There are agencies out there that are charging hospitals \$105 per hour plus HST.

That's nearly double what it was almost one year ago—double. It's because they're getting away with it. A third agency is also charging a similar amount: \$110 per hour. It's just shocking when you think the hourly wage for a fully employed nurse is much below that. Where is this money going? Where is this public money going? It's going into private hands, and this government is allowing it.

Cathryn Hoy, the president of the Ontario Nurses' Association, has been ringing alarm bells. She has visited us here in this chamber. We have heard claims that this government was going to meet with her, but I don't know that that meeting has happened yet. She also points out the critical gap that exists when we have these temporary for-hire nurses, that we don't have the same quality of care. They don't necessarily know the location in which they're working, which could lead to there possibly being an accident. Really, this is just the further undermining of our treasured public system.

Recently we've heard a lot of words about this government and health care. We've heard the Premier say that he's going to do everything he can to add more health care workers to our system. I can tell you, our recommendation, from this side of the House, is to repeal Bill 124. We also should see fairness. We see this government talk quite frequently about competition, about business, and yet we see with Bill 124 that it's not allowing due process to occur. It's not allowing nurses that ability to bargain for fair wages. It does make one wonder whether this government is afraid, whether they're afraid if nurses will get what they actually deserve. The question is up to you. You have it within your power to get rid of that odious piece of legislation and make sure nurses are able to renegotiate their wages and their current contracts.

We also heard that this government is looking for the sector's advice. You should be talking to the front lines. You should be talking to the actual experts, the people who see what is happening in our hospitals: the nurses, the physicians.

1630

Next with my comments, I'd like to turn to what this budget fails to do for working people. We know that we are in a tremendous labour shortage. For the longest time, we have had a government that is very business-centric. Instead, we should change our approach. We should have a worker-centric approach to government.

We know that many people are struggling because they can't fill the gaps within their workplace, and that's simply because workers are not being paid enough. Take a look at the rate of inflation: 8.1%. If wages are not keeping up with inflation, then people are just choosing not to become involved in the labour market, and that is an incredible crisis.

We also know that if we take a look at a more worker-centric type of approach, if we see the workforce not as a tool that can be easily replaced but instead as something that belongs there, something that is a cornerstone, where there's a more permanent relationship, where workers form the foundation of the business itself—I know it's a mental shift, but it's one that will bear a tremendous change for this government. It also ensures continuity—

that workers have identified with the business in which they work. They're more inclined to remain there. The loss of skills, the amount of money that is lost on retraining is absorbed by this model.

I also would like to put forward our recommendations for how we can change the economy in this province. If we take a look at businesses that are employee-owned—I know it's a fundamental shift. If we take a look at different options that are available—if we look at something like employee stock ownership plans, a plan where there's an ESOP trust. There are many of these examples, whether it's in the United States—where the company pays back the loan and individual employees typically don't use their savings to buy the stock. It's something where they give that chance to allow individuals to have that greater ownership, that actual financial ownership of a company, and that sense of belonging, and that desire to see the business improve and become better and better and better. There are also many other employee ownership trusts. These are a great example as well. They are perpetual trusts. They're owned by all the employees of a firm, and they make regular profit-sharing investment payments to the workers. They're just beginning to spread. This is really a fundamental shift. If we want to take a look at wealth and how to build community wealth, these are examples of how we can ensure that Ontario is the most prosperous engine that drives our country.

Within this budget, as well as a statement of values and a moral document—we also see that housing is such a huge, huge issue.

I want to point out some information from the Royal Bank of Canada, who indicate that because of the pandemic, we saw housing prices go through the roof. RBC points out that had visible minorities owned homes at a similar rate to white Canadians during the pandemic, their collective net wealth would be \$100 billion higher.

We don't see any mention of equity-seeking groups, or not nearly enough, within this budget, and that is really a shame. That is something this government has missed. We know that the pandemic has hit certain communities far harder than others, whether it was the actual virus itself or whether it was the economic results of not being able to work, of businesses closing and so many other things—the cost of child care, the burden of child care, looking after children at home while they went to do their schooling.

As well, I did want to point out some important things about employee ownership. Employee ownership would be a wonderful way for this government to implement a fiscal change in this province. It would take away that typical model where it's one person who is spending all of their time working and not seeing, necessarily, the benefits of that job as much as the people who own that business.

These are great models. I would love to discuss them further with this government.

I also want to point towards things that would be a great benefit in this province, that will be an economic driver.

We heard for many, many years the Liberal government that preceded this government talk about rail connections and the Windsor corridor. This government needs to make sure that they are also taking a look towards transit and

making sure that southwestern Ontario has high-speed access on rail.

Recently, in my community, we saw that GO Transit has been expanded, but unfortunately, it hasn't been expanded in the most effective way just yet. It is not as quick and it does not happen as frequently as is needed at this time.

I would also like to point this government towards the implementation of community benefits agreements. Community benefits agreements are truly wonderful. They impact the procurement process. They allow governments to make sure—projects that are involved in the community. They reflect the community. They take stock of all the people who are involved; they ask for their input. And they make sure that they're also hiring from that community. So not only do they become a creation of the place in which they are; they become a creation of the people who live and work in that place in which they are. There also is a way in which they can make sure that they're hiring from equity-seeking groups or equity-deserving groups, to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in the prosperity that communities deserve.

I want to discuss some of the basic principles of community wealth building. We've already discussed how labour is more important than capital. We need to, after the COVID-19 pandemic, make sure that we are reinforcing our communities. When a crisis hits, we need to make sure that we're actually preserving jobs, and that is possible with employee ownership. It also influences active democratic participation. It also really impacts such things as collaboration and making sure that there are investments in the community and wealth. We see the labour force shrinking. We see that Canada is shedding jobs and workers are continuing to leave the job force because, unfortunately, they're not getting paid enough. How are you going to combat that? Keeping Bill 124, I can suggest, is certainly not a way to do it.

Following along from employment is one of the more core basic principles, which is housing. We saw that with the dramatic escalation in house prices that occurred, many people jumped into the housing market. Many people were priced out of the market. Many people may never get to realize that dream of home ownership. That is such a disgrace. It is such a shame. I also worry, with the Bank of Canada's overnight rate increasing, that there are many people who have locked themselves into mortgages who may now find themselves into a negative equity situation, where they're actually paying off a house that doesn't necessarily have that same value as when they first purchased it. That impact of the housing market escalating through the roof—we've also seen the rental market escalating in an absolutely untenable fashion. We have seen that average rent rose—let us see: In Ontario, the average rental climbed with a 3.1% monthly increase and a 15.2% jump over one year. Can you imagine?

1640

When you budget in your household, you decide how much money you can spend for your house; you decide how much money you can spend for your food; how much money you need to spend on your dependents; and, if

you're lucky enough, you can have some money for leisure or what have you. But when you see increases of this kind, it's far too much. It's absolutely unacceptable.

We also have seen from this government that, back in 2018, they removed rent control from new builds, builds that were completed or occupied after November 2018. And we've seen corporate faceless landlords increasing rental prices by 7%, 10%, you name it—the sky is the limit. Those are people who are going to now be precariously housed. If you don't have a safe place to call home, then not much else matters in this world.

It's frightening as well because there are many seniors. And I want to turn my comments towards vacancy decontrol—that's just a fancy term for when a property or a unit becomes vacant—that there is no control on the amount of rent that the landlord may charge for that unit. So that means that there is an incentive, there is almost a kickback for a landlord to look at their tenants who have been there for many, many years and decide, oh, if that person were not in that unit—that unit they've called home for a number of years—then they're able to charge through the roof. So what does that result in? That results in corporate faceless landlords who are incentivized to kick good people out so they can charge whatever the market will accept. That's a shame.

With the escalation in housing prices, we also saw a number of housing units and developments change hands. That meant that all of those individuals who had been there for a number of years were being threatened with bogus evictions, were being constantly harassed and bothered by their landlords, to the point where they no longer enjoyed the place that they have called home. But what is left for them, Speaker? We don't have a government that has built truly affordable and supportive housing for these people to call home.

What about the seniors who have raised our families? They have worked hard. They have helped build our system. They've contributed to our system. And what does this government have to say to those seniors who are running the risk of losing their housing? Quite frankly, what we also see within this budget is nowhere near enough supports for seniors. There are some—and I will give this government credit for certain innovations: to make sure that they're able to claim a certain amount of money on improvements that they need to make for their health. But, also, with those requirements, we need to take a look at them because they also have to spend a certain amount of money in order to receive that tax rebate.

When we look at what happened in the long-term-care sector—in the private, for-profit long-term-care sector—it should give us all pause. And yet, this government is content to reward some of the bad actors, some of the worst of the worst, allowing them to look after thousands of more seniors. I had hoped that this government would realize that profit that is created on the backs of seniors suffering is not acceptable. The fact that the army had to be called in to homes where seniors were crying out for help, were in beds that had no bedsheets, were covered in their own filth, with trays of food sitting in the corner gathering vermin—it should be a signal to us all that action

had to be taken. And yet we don't see that within this budget.

So I'm going to recommend once again the human benefit but also the financial benefit of bringing all long-term care back under public control. It is a huge waste of taxpayers' dollars and this province's resources to not care for seniors in a way that is dignified, that respects them, and that is, quite frankly, simply the right thing to do. That is our proposition for this government.

As well, when looking at what seniors are facing right now, and when looking at this budget, let's come back to our 8.1% inflationary increase. We know that seniors are living on fixed incomes. We know that pensions and old age security are not keeping up with inflation. We need to make sure that there are more supports for them, to make sure they're not at risk of losing housing. While I've mentioned some who might be at risk of losing housing because of unfair landlords, there are also many more who are simply living month to month and scared.

Another industry that has become an industry which should be a social service is the home care industry. When it was privatized, it was said that it would be the best thing since sliced bread, and that again, there would be choice, there would be competition, and it would be wonderful, and we've seen anything but. If we want to look towards the fiscal future of our province, we need to make sure that seniors are able to stay in their homes as long as possible. First of all, it's the place they want to be. Second of all, it's the place where they are healthiest; it's where their heart is. And if you want to look at it in a fiscal way, they're contributing to the tax base; they're also providing money to this province. And yet, we don't see enough of a focus on seniors despite them being a rapidly growing demographic.

I'm glad that in one regard there were some improvements made from April 2022 up until now. That does take the form of the 5% increase to ODSP and the fact that it is indexed to inflation. However, it's not nearly enough. I want this government to know, and I know this government has heard—I know you've heard from constituents within all of your ridings—that people who are on the Ontario Disability Support Program are deeply concerned for their lives. Many have made the impossible choice and are considering medically assisted death as a result of this province's neglect. It is legislated poverty. This \$56 is not going to go far enough; 5% is nowhere near enough. Yet we also have seen no improvements whatsoever to Ontario Works. That's truly, truly frightening.

What is also not mentioned at any time in this budget is supports for families of children with autism. I can't fathom how this government really hasn't learned the lesson that has been told to them from so many people protesting out front of Queen's Park. The government before, trying to cut autism funding at five, and this government clearing the wait-list and putting people back on an even lengthier wait-list—you have to do more.

1650

I have spoken with families in my riding who received the one-time cheque from this government. That's not what they wanted. They did not want a government that

would simply cut a cheque and run. We need authentic, needs-based therapy to make sure kids get what they need when they need it. This investment in autism therapies will make all of the difference in an entire child's life. If we get a kid the supports they need, it opens up the world, but the delays and the talk and the empty words that have been on this file are absolutely heinous.

Now, there are also recommendations from the province's own Housing Affordability Task Force. The goal is to build 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years, but we don't see that within an actual plan within this legislation. We see mention of it, but we need this government to actually talk about how they're going to be in the business of building, how they're going to create it. It's often said by this government that we oppose them, and there are certain pieces that of course we do oppose, Speaker. We want to make sure that legislation is as strong as possible, and that it achieves its end goals and its desired results. But as you know, with omnibus legislation, sometimes they try to sneak some things by, which, quite frankly, we can't stand for.

As I said with WSIB, I think one day I will hear that MPP Kernaghan voted against the WSIB in London, which is absolutely, categorically false. We know that that is simply not going to happen.

I also want to come back to the government in the 1990s, the last NDP provincial government, which built the greatest amount of public, affordable and social housing of any government—tens of thousands of units—many of which still exist to this day. We are here, as opposition, to help you build that. We also want to make sure that this government is able to do that. We can give you recommendations.

I did want to point out a couple of quick things. In particular, as I said before, I'm thrilled with the notion that, on the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, you're going to repeal the certain portion that requires it to be located in Toronto and that it will be moved to London. That's amazing. I can't thank you enough for that.

What I am concerned with is that there is very little in this legislation about what the plan is. There is this sort of pie-in-the-sky thinking with this government, and oftentimes it's kicked down the road to regulation or simply ignored, or just because it comes up, they expect us to take them at their word.

But with the WSIB itself, first, there's no timeline. There are no indications of what is required from the city of London in terms of location. What sort of space do you need? Where would you like it to be? It's almost as though this announcement came before any consultation.

I've also heard from folks who work in WSIB in Toronto that the workers weren't consulted either. With the potential for this office to move to London, workers don't even know whether they'll have the opportunity to relocate, and that's a concern. That is something that this government does need to address.

There have also been job postings that I have seen popping up for the WSIB and some of them are located in London, some are located in Toronto, but many of these are hybrid positions where one could also work from

home. So I implore this government to provide more practical details about what their plan is, what the relocation is going to look like. Part of that is to make sure that people are prepared because with the labour market crunch, we know that many of these folks cannot be hired overnight. I look forward to all of the jobs that will be created by this move for London because London has such an excellent, intelligent, skilled workforce, and the wonderful health care institutions that we have are second to none. It will be a great location. But please make sure that you are actually providing details and a plan, not these broad strokes simply saying that you want to move. Tell us how. Tell us what you need and we will get it done.

Now, what is also curious about this is that we don't see the investments in education that are required. We see a one-time payment to parents, but there still are very hazy details. That's a concern for us on the opposition side. We want to make sure that we have smaller, safer classrooms, something that we will continue to recommend, because education is an investment, it is not a cost.

Not only does it cut education, it doesn't help ordinary Ontarians. It doesn't have any consequences whatsoever for corporations who gouge. There's nothing in here for consumer protection.

I did want to point out that there are some good things in here, which I do also want to thank the government for. They've increased the income threshold for the LIFT credit from \$38,500 to \$50,000. However, we also could take a look at the seniors at home tax credit, which I mentioned already earlier, that's 25% of medical expenses up to \$6,000 for this maximum credit of \$1,500. But that's also for somebody who can first put that money out.

Now, auto insurance, because that is also one of the promises that we see within this. This does relate to consumer protection in that this government had mentioned that it is going to crack down on fraud and that is somehow going to lower auto insurance rates. But there's no real explanation of how that's going to be done.

In terms of our health care spending, yes, there is going to be a focus on health care, working and training and retention incentives, but I can tell you right now the greatest retention incentive is to repeal Bill 124.

What is missing from this is—and this is something from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They noted there is no real action on climate change. There are things that actually this government had mentioned in 2018, integral parts of their plan which are now missing. And really, that's quite surprising. Whether it is issues such as housing, the fundamental issues that affect our ability to live our lives, to be productive and to be healthy—housing is one, but the Earth is also a house that we must protect. I'm quite surprised and shocked that there are no mentions of the environment, climate change and the need to mitigate the dramatic things that we are seeing.

1700

Some of the stakeholders who have reacted include the Ontario Federation of Labour. They pointed out, as the official opposition has, that this budget is too little, too late for working Ontarians.

The YWCA said that there are all these promises of capital investments, but missing are investments in the people who will staff these new buildings and the projects in caring for marginalized communities in the province.

This government tends to claim that it is spending so much on health care, but it's spending on furniture and it's spending on buildings. It's not spending on the people who actually staff those beds, the people who provide that front-line care—the person who is at your bedside making sure that you're healthy, making sure you're on the road to recovery—and that's such a shame.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives pointed out, “The main business of budgets is the delivery of public services and, on this front, this budget falls flat. Despite all the spending, public services do not seem to be a priority.”

As I mentioned, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce said, “While the budget places a strong focus on electric vehicles supply chains, we would have liked to have seen a more comprehensive approach to tackle climate change, including a plan to reduce GHG emissions.”

And the Canadian Mental Health Association: “The provincial budget ... neglected to recognize historical underfunding in the community-based mental health and addictions sector.”

So, Speaker, they can take action. They can use this budget as a statement of values to directly take on the health care crisis, to stop the privatization that we've seen destroying our long-term-care sector, our home care sector. We could have a budget that invests in working people.

I also want to add the voices of folks in my riding who are concerned about how this government is not investing properly in this budget and long-term care.

Jane said, “For-profit long-term-care homes should not be allowed. They should be more like hospitals in terms of being public institutions....”

“We need ... to make it feasible to keep elderly parents in their own homes. We need a societal shift away from putting seniors in these places.”

Jane went on to discuss how she and her family had the opportunity to keep their 91-year-old mother at home and keep someone as the caregiver.

The NDP has made some tremendous plans, and we would like to help you make sure that seniors are cared for properly in their own homes in the right way. Or, at the very least, if this government must invest, then invest in the publicly delivered or the municipally delivered homes that provide the greatest level and quality of care.

Christiane said, “I'll be 65 this year. So I'll let you do the math when I say that when I was a teenager, I worked after school in a privately owned nursing home. My mother worked ... as an aide in the same nursing home.

“At that time, when I went in the home, it smelled of urine and there would be some of the residents who needed extra care.”

This was many years ago, and yet these problems persist. There is a real opportunity and there is a real drive

and a real need right now to solve these problems. Allowing some of the worst of the worst to care for yet more seniors is simply not acceptable.

I see that I am starting to run out of time and I need to make sure to get through all of the things I wanted to. There are many things that this budget requires.

We also take a look at, and I mentioned this earlier, how many people have left the sector—nurses—and how there has been a cut to social services and health and social services. I'd like to see this government not simply budgeting but investing. Health care is an investment; it is not a cost. Education, similarly, and looking after seniors—it should be the right thing to do, and yet this government takes a look at it in a financial way. But quite interestingly, there's a greater cost to not investing properly in health care. There's a greater cost to not looking at the root causes of poverty.

I wanted to also take a look at some of the comments from our financial critic as well as our interim leader. This government has failed in an opportunity to course-correct with this budget. We saw a few changes from April to now, but we don't see nearly enough. The crisis that is happening in health care and social services—there are 5,400 fewer workers in Ontario compared to just one year ago, and then this budget includes deep cuts that don't keep up with inflation and deep cuts in real dollars. It's really, truly frightening. I also wanted to point out that the Ontario Nurses' Association has not been addressed by this government. Cathryn Hoy has come to this Legislature a number of times. This wage suppression is contributing to the HR crisis that is in our hospitals right now.

What I also find curious is that there's this one-time payment that is currently broad strokes right now, with this government, that we have very few or little details on, rather than an investment in the education system. Parents are going to be lining up to get this cash, and yet much like the autism file, you're putting that burden on people who are already very busy, people who are already over-worked. Would that money not be better spent on the expert who is already in a classroom or putting an additional expert in a classroom in the form of educational assistants?

My background is in education, and it's shocking to see the cuts and the underfunding that have historically plagued the education sector. This goes back years and years. During the previous Liberal government, we saw concepts such as inclusion, which we can all agree with. All students should be included. They should be part of the school community, and yet the Liberal government shuffled students into classrooms without support. That is not inclusion; that is abandonment.

Educational assistants, when there was greater funding within our school system, used to actually offer supports for students who weren't the ones who were struggling the most. They were the ones in the middle who just needed that little bit of extra support. They used to run reading groups. The achievement that was possible was amazing. Unfortunately, in a classroom that is losing money year after year after year when there are more and more and more students year after year, what will happen is a teacher

will often spend the majority of their time dealing with the folks who need the most help, and those kids who just need a little bit of one-on-one support or a little bit of assistance fly under the radar, and that's such a shame.

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Now, as well, just to make sure I punctuate for this government so they understand, those who rely on ODSP will stay, even with the improvements that this government has made, below the deep poverty line. It is something that is actually defined by this government, by the province as 75% of the official poverty line. This is something this government could choose to fix if it were some of their values, if they saw the importance of it, if they listened to their conscience and made sure to do the right thing.

Despite some things that in this budget are quite good, there are many things that it lacks. This is a statement of your values. This is a statement of morals. This is a statement of what is possible. Use this as an opportunity to fix the health care crisis that is happening now. Use this as an opportunity to strengthen working people in our province. Use this as an opportunity to really address the housing crisis. And I know this government is going to say their Strong Mayors, Building Homes legislation—which is strangely named—is addressing that, but they should use this as an opportunity as well if it was that much of a priority. Listen to your own task force, implement the recommendations and actually get in the business of building affordable housing.

Expecting the private for-profit industry to simply create affordable and supportive homes is not enough. It's akin to crossing your fingers and hoping for the best. We need actual legislation that is going to mandate the creation of not simply affordable housing but rent-gear-to-income housing in all new developments across the province. Make sure that this is a natural and normal part of every single new development within our province. It will lead to a far more robust, a far more diverse and a far more accurate reflection of our province in every single community.

Not only do you need to tackle the housing crisis and should do it with robust investments, but make sure that you're supporting seniors. Finally do what you said you were going to do during the pandemic, which was to make sure seniors are cared for properly, with dignity, with respect, and that is within publicly delivered care, within a municipally run home, not in a private for-profit home. How is it possible that anyone within this province can profit off of someone's old age? It's immoral. It is wrong. It should cause pain in all of your hearts given that you have all read the army report and you know what happened there. Do not reward the worst of the worst. Use that money to make sure people have their best life. That's a choice that you will need to make. And not only making sure seniors are safe and are housed, turn your attention to social assistance: 5%, or \$56, is not nearly enough.

Greater investments in education will bring dividends long term. I'd also like to suggest to this government that in the education system, there used to be trades training within the elementary school system. I still remember

having shop class. That was something that inspired many people, but yet that was taken out. Here's an opportunity. We know we need more skilled trades workers; we know we need to reach them sooner. Sometimes high school is too late. Sometimes they've already decided on a career path, but they haven't had that opportunity to have real hands-on experience with actually creating or actually building. If you do that, it changes a life and it will help us build this province.

I also wanted to make sure that this government takes a stronger eye towards consumer protection within this province. We were proud, on this side of the House, to introduce legislation, a consumer watchdog act, and I hope that this government will see the necessity for it. It's something that is missing from this budget and it's something that is necessary, especially with our aging demographic.

As well, the glaring omission of autism supports—this is surprising to me. I hope this government will see that they have missed a number of things.

The budget is not simply a moral document or a statement of values; the budget is an opportunity. The budget is an opportunity to chart a course, to look forward to the future and to make sure people are able to build their best life. I hope that in consultation with an opposition that is providing their feedback, which is proposing some changes, some things that you might have missed, that you will heed that advice, that you will think, and think long and hard, about what we can offer to you to make sure that this budget is a budget that achieves your desired results. That is up to you. We can call back and forth all day long, but we are an opposition that is willing to work with you, so make sure that you listen to us.

I want to thank you all for listening to my presentation today, and I look forward to the questions from the honourable members across.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: All the credit to the member from London North Centre. It's not easy to stand up for an hour and carry debate. And congratulations to you, again, on your re-election. It's good to see you back.

As part of the kinder, gentler Mike Harris today, I'm not going to take the bait on the Bob Rae, early 1990s government part of your speech, but I do want to talk about GO train service, because you did bring that up. It's a very important topic because both our communities are lacking GO train service. We've seen a very large expansion in GO train service to Kitchener now with, dare I say, an almost 100% increase in trains over what we had seen through previous governments. The next logical stop, of course, is London, and there is a pilot program that is running there now.

So I would venture to give the member an opportunity. Here is the government listening to you. How can we help improve train service for your constituents in London?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for your comments, even though you did start off with an “I'm sorry, but,” or a “no offence, but”—I'm just teasing.

You're right. There has been an expansion of the pilot program of GO service; however, what I must point out is

that that service happens on some of the worst rail lines. So, unfortunately, it is incredibly slow. It is a welcome thing, but when somebody is spending over four hours one way from London to Toronto, that's something that's unfortunately throwing good money after bad. I'm very concerned that any investment from this government should achieve its desired result and unfortunately at this time, I don't know that ridership is as strong or as robust as it ought to be.

I also know from your riding itself that constituents in your riding are calling for more frequency. Same thing from London: faster and more frequency. That's what we need.

We were promised high-speed rail by the Liberals for many years. We need to make sure that is a reality in the province, and that's up to this government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Ms. Doly Begum: I also want to thank the member for his remarks and congratulate him on his re-election, and say thank you very much for carrying on this important debate.

You've highlighted a lot of important points, including the fact that we proposed this amazing bill, a consumer protection act, which would have helped a lot of people across this province.

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One of the things I want to ask the member is, when we look at a budget—and we consider that a moral document. I know many of our colleagues here have talked about a budget being a moral document, because it really highlights what the government wants to do and how we're going to really address the many different issues that people across this province are facing but especially the health care crisis that we are right now facing in this province. So if the member could highlight just a few things that could have been in the budget that could have really helped the people of this province.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I think that, starting off the comments, as well—the things that need to be in this budget are a commitment to scrapping Bill 124, a recommitment of the value of nurses and what they provide to our communities. It has been a slap in the face for folks who have struggled so hard. They have worked tirelessly. They're afraid of infecting themselves, of infecting their family. Oftentimes, they were sleeping in basements or in trailers, having to spend time away from their family, because people didn't know about COVID and they might have somebody who is immunocompromised. But then to deal them with a 1% threshold for their wages—it's wage suppression.

I wish this government weren't afraid of collective bargaining, and I wish they would treat nurses with the respect that they deserve and allow them to collectively bargain, allow them to have an increase that keeps up with inflation. Otherwise, 1% is just 7% of a cut. This PC government has told nurses that they're not worth it, and that's a shame.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we have the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the member for London North Centre for being up there for an hour. It is a challenge. I've been there, and it seems that that hour takes a long time sometimes, more than 60 minutes.

But I do want to say, he talked about the need to consult on the budget. I do want to remind the members on the opposite side that we had the ultimate consultation. It was 28 days. We went to the people of Ontario, the ultimate arbiter, and they passed judgment on the budget. They overwhelmingly said yes to Doug Ford and the Progressive Conservatives and their budget, so thank you very much. You might want to follow the lead of the people of Ontario and support the budget.

I do want to point out about the WSIB office going to London—and a congratulations. That's a great thing. But he says, on one hand, "Thanks to the government, but I want to know more about the plans." It is a decision, when we're going to move that office. But I want you to understand one thing, and I know you do: When President Kennedy stood up and said that the United States of America would be the first country to put a man on the moon, as he said, he didn't actually know the plan. But they did it because they were committed to doing it. We're doing exactly that.

I'm going to ask the member from London North Centre, because we're sending jobs to your city, will you do like the people of Ontario and support the budget?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: To the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, thank you for the question—though you, Speaker, of course. But I must also point out that while we might be hot on the heels of a provincial election, I think it's important to note that 60% of Ontarians did not vote for this government or for this budget. I think, as well, we need to take a look and make sure—

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: They didn't vote for you, either.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The conversations are starting to get a little loud. I'd ask the members to come to order.

The member for London North Centre can reply.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: The member from Carleton just indicated that she didn't vote for me either. Oh, what a shame.

It's interesting, because it's fine to go and talk about broad strokes, but I think when there is a movement of this magnitude with WSIB, there needs to be consultation, there needs to be discussion between this provincial government and the municipality. They need to talk with city officials. They need to talk and make sure that there is a plan in place, there are requirements being met and that there are measures to make sure that this is as effective as possible. I don't think it's quite the same as comparing this to going to the moon. Maybe this is such a dramatic achievement for this government and they are very proud of that. That's wonderful. We're happy to welcome WSIB; let's just have a more robust plan. Let's have more consultation. Let's make sure that we do it as effectively as possible.

And also, I'd like to know—yes, it's going to create jobs for London—how many jobs is it going to create? That's been very silent from this government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for St. Catharines.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I would like to thank my colleague from London North Centre and also congratulate him on his re-election.

Thank you for putting under a microscope and pointing out to this government this afternoon that they have only committed a 5% increase to ODSP benefits. That doesn't do enough right now in the common life of somebody who is a recipient of ODSP. In Niagara, it's approximately increasing their livelihood by about \$55, and of course the inflation of the rate of renovations is happening, and people on ODSP are finding it very difficult to find a place to rent. It doesn't even match the current inflation levels that you pointed out of 8%.

What would the official opposition—what plan do you think we would put in place when we are in control of this budget? Hopefully the government will listen. What would we put in for ODSP recipients? What would we do to pull them out of the complete poverty that they're in right now?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: When we take a look at some of the measures that were implemented by the federal government during the COVID-19 pandemic, they determined that \$2,000 a month was an adequate living wage to make sure that people were able to maintain their lives and their livelihoods. We believe on the official opposition side that ODSP needs to be doubled. It needs to make sure that it meets that.

That's something that we stand for, because ultimately, when you make sure that people have the support that they need, they have a healthier life. They have a better life. They're able to look forward towards education. There are so many things—they're able to buy healthy food—but ultimately, there's also a mental health impact to know that the government isn't stuffing somebody into legislated poverty. These are all things that this government could tackle with the official opposition's help.

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

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: It is my pleasure to join the debate in this House today, to speak about the importance and urgency to move forward and pass our government's 2022 budget measures bill so that we can move swiftly to implement Ontario's Plan to Build. Mr. Speaker, this bill confirms our government's commitment that was made to all Ontarians, a commitment to implement the 2022 budget and build a stronger Ontario for families, workers and businesses.

From 2003 until 2018, tens of thousands of high-paying manufacturing jobs left Ontario because of failed policies of the previous government of that time frame. As a result of those policies, Ontario lost 15 years and sorely lagged behind the rest of Canada, and people's standard of living diminished to levels not seen in decades.

But we have a plan, Mr. Speaker: a plan that will modernize our aging and crumbling infrastructure. We will put

shovels in the ground on building highways, roads and bridges and improving public transit to fight gridlock and get people to work and home faster. We will get it done. We have a plan to continue to invest in publicly funded health care, giving hospitals, long-term care and home care the necessary resources to deliver the quality of care that seniors and patients deserve, while keeping our economy open and strong.

We made these pledges to the Ontario citizenry during the spring 2022 election, and the people of Ontario rendered their verdict and overwhelmingly approved of our budget on June 2. We are not limiting our plan to just health care and highways. Our government is also expanding on its vision to build a stronger Ontario, with new investments in tutoring supports for students and increasing Ontario Disability Support Program payments as funded from existing contingencies within the current fiscal plan.

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To help those who qualify for disability support, this government is delivering on its commitment to increase the rates for income support by 5%, beginning next month. September 2022, this increase for families and persons will be available under the Ontario Disability Support Program, ODSP. Also by next month, the government will increase the assistance rate for the children with severe disabilities program. The monthly maximum amount will increase by 5%. It should be noted further, Mr. Speaker, that future ODSP rates will also be adjusted to inflation. Affordability with these increased investments in the Ontario Disability Support Program: These payments will be funded from existing contingencies, again within the current fiscal plan.

This is welcome news for many families in Ontario, just like my own. My son Jake is developmentally delayed and is on the autism spectrum, as I have advised this House earlier from a personal perspective. And despite his many challenges, I say again that we celebrate his many abilities and accomplishments.

Our government further plans to implement our strategy to seize opportunities in critical minerals, batteries, and electric and hybrid vehicle manufacturing. These investments will help deliver better jobs and bigger paycheques for workers and, at the same time, we will help keep costs down for families.

Our government recognizes the need for making these crucial investments in green energy and electric and hybrid vehicles. In the past six months, our government made significant investments in electric vehicle manufacturing in Windsor and at the revitalized GM plant in Oshawa. Thousands of local auto sector jobs that were lost 10 years ago are now coming back because of the commitment of this government that was made to bolster the automotive sector with clean-energy electric vehicles.

Why is it important to make these investments today? Specifically, in Durham region and eastward, the Highway 401 corridor is an important economic link to the GTA, to Durham region and eastern Ontario. This corridor is the gateway to Ontario's largest trading partner, the province

of Quebec. The 401 corridor carries, on average, 17,000 trucks each day, with commodities valued at \$615 million each day. About \$75 million worth of US-related trade also moves through this corridor.

Therefore, our government is undertaking early works and property acquisitions along Highway 401, including bridge replacements in Oshawa and Port Hope. This work will enable future widening of Highway 401 to relieve congestion starting at Brock Road in Pickering, through Oshawa and Bowmanville, and right into Port Hope and the rest of eastern Ontario. Mr. Speaker, as a member of this government, I am passionate about seeing these important projects through to completion.

As one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Ontario, Durham region is focused on the future. Durham is bursting with opportunities for business, offering a chance to engage with some of Ontario's most skilled and innovative workers and entrepreneurs. This budget bill reemphasizes a strong commitment to not only Durham region, but to all Ontario municipalities. More specifically, this budget measures bill represents a commitment to my constituents in Bowmanville that the GO rail extension will finally be a reality.

For almost 20 years, the residents of Bowmanville have been let down by the previous government with unfulfilled promises of building, empty talk about the Bowmanville GO train expansion. So, Mr. Speaker, we are finally getting it done, as we have pledged to do.

Both the GO Lakeshore East extension and the further widening of Highway 401 will help drive the success of our communities. We look forward to the economic, social and environmental benefits produced by these important investments.

And these are important investments, Mr. Speaker. During the spring campaign, culminating in the June 2 election and the overwhelming mandate we received from the people of Ontario for this budget, I knocked on thousands of doors with my volunteers and spoke with countless residents, not only in my riding but across Durham region, and the response was always the same: With the rapid growth of our region, these projects and improvements to our infrastructure are desperately needed. Our fellow citizens recognized that in this campaign, and they will inevitably appreciate this coming to fruition to the passage of this budget bill.

I am sure that all of my colleagues in this House who serve the residents of Durham region, including the member for Oshawa across the aisle, will agree that our government's investments are not only good for Durham and needed for Durham but also good for all of Ontario.

On April 5 this year, our government provided the people and the businesses of Durham region with more travel options while keeping their hard-earned money in their pockets. Our government did so by permanently removing the tolls on Highways 412 and 418. Removing these tolls saved Durham commuters \$7.50 per day on Highway 418 and \$3.75 per trip on Highway 412.

The removal of these tolls and lowering the cost of vehicle ownership by cutting gasoline taxes and eliminating licence plate renewal fees further demonstrates our

government's commitment to help all families grow and thrive. While our opponents and detractors may think removing the tolls is a small or empty gesture, rest assured that when I was out knocking on doors—and since this election of June 2 and the overwhelming mandate for our government that came with it—when I speak to residents and continue to be in touch in our community, I can tell you that the residents of Courtice and Bowmanville and throughout the riding of Durham do appreciate what has occurred. They see it as meaningful and also recognize the fact that it has the ripple effect of more travel options.

Ever since the Liberals implemented those tolls back in 2017, Durham families have been outraged quite frankly about another Liberal tax. To this day, they continue to thank us for eliminating those tolls and for allowing people to have more travel options and keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets.

It is not just myself or my colleagues, by the way, echoing these common-sense policies. Back in April, the mayor of the town of Whitby, Don Mitchell, praised our government for this policy and stated at that time:

"The removal of tolls on Highway 412 is a great thing for the town of Whitby and will have a positive impact on our residents' quality of life by reducing traffic congestion, improving access to the 407 and 401 for commuters and making it easier to access and do business in our downtowns. A toll-free highway will also help generate economic value in our community by enabling the realization of the full marketability of the employment lands located along the 412. On behalf of Whitby town council, I thank the Premier and the province for taking action on an issue we have been passionate about for years."

So it's not just about keeping costs down. It's about travel options. It's about ending gridlock. It's about making sure that we don't have unnecessary idling vehicles, which is harmful to the environment. There are so many aspects to this that include affordability and keeping costs down, Mr. Speaker.

The chair of the transportation task force for the Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade within Durham region, Mr. Chris Vale, remarked that on behalf of his board of trade, he "would like to thank Premier Ford, Minister Mulroney and the province of Ontario for listening to voices of the business of community and for its decision to remove the tolls on Highways 412/418. The removal of the tolls on these highways will help promote economic development in Durham region and will help facilitate the continued movement of people, goods, and services in and through Durham which will relieve congestion on our local roads as well as improving access to the 407 corridor. This decision will make Durham an even better place to attract investment in our communities which will connect people to jobs and support the ongoing economic recovery efforts."

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But I also cannot emphasize enough, Speaker, about the need for improving transportation in other areas of our province besides what I spoke about in Durham. Building and completing the new Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass and the highway to the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario will further unleash economic growth. These

highways will bring efficiency and prosperity for all of Ontario, and with economic growth comes the ability to fund core public services like health care and education.

Frank Notte, who is the director of government relations for the Trillium Automobile Dealers Association, praised our government on this commitment by saying, "We're also excited to see a commitment to build Highway 413 connecting Halton, Peel and York regions. The TADA has been advocating for this new 400-series highway since 2012—and are pleased to see the province finally move forward with this much-needed highway."

Mr. Speaker, like all Ontarians, I am a passionate advocate for our province's health care system, and I am proud to stand here today to repeat our government's promise, through this bill, to do what's right in investing and protecting our publicly funded universal health care system.

My family's situation is no different than what many Ontarians face daily. My wife Kathy and I lovingly care for two aging parents, and this requires attention and resources. And our resilient son Jake, while making the most of his opportunities, requires supportive care and attention as well. So in addition to family supports, we also need access to universal public health care. Our family needs it. Every family needs it. Our government supports it. Our government is investing in public health care—universal public health care—and at the same time growing the economy so it can continue to be funded, and funded well.

Mr. Speaker, my family and thousands of Ontario families could not do what we do without the help of exceptional and dedicated nurses, PSWs and health care workers. They need our support, which is why this government, through the budget measures bill, is making the single largest health care and hospital infrastructure investment in the history of Ontario.

Just to cite a couple of examples: Our multi-billion dollar investment will, in Ontario, help build a new state-of-the-art Mississauga Hospital and expand the Queensway Health Centre, both of which are part of Trillium Health Partners.

In Scarborough, as part of Scarborough Health Network's redevelopment plan, our government is investing to build a new in-patient tower and renovate the existing Birchmount site to support an increased demand for services. The first phase of the project includes the expansion of the emergency department to increase capacity and meet the current demand and future growth. The expanded emergency department will reduce wait times, improve patient flow and update aging infrastructure to support 50,000 patients each year. This, again, is welcome news, Speaker. As Liz Buller, who is the president and CEO of the Scarborough Health Network, has said, "This historic budget is great news for Scarborough Health Network and all Scarborough residents. The investments made in the future of health care facilities across the province will allow us to deliver the best care in the best hospitals."

And to further respond to the need for more health care services in other areas of Ontario, our PC Ford government has committed to transforming the existing site at the

William Osler Health System's Peel Memorial Hospital into a new in-patient hospital with a 24/7 emergency department and new beds. The new in-patient hospital will also reduce wait times and expand services, including enhanced seniors, mental health and addictions, rehabilitation and complex continuing care for patients and their families.

The province is investing \$27 billion over the next 10 years in health infrastructure projects. This will lead to \$40 billion in capital investments that will create approximately 3,000 new hospital beds across Ontario. Some of the projects, the additional projects, that will result in new beds being added to the health care system include the new Niagara Falls hospital, the Ottawa Hospital, Lakeridge Health Bowmanville, Hospital for Sick Children and Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. In Ontario, there are 52 major hospital projects under construction or in various stages of planning. When complete, the Bowmanville redevelopment project will renew and renovate the existing facility to accommodate a new neonatal intensive care unit and expand acute in-patient care, emergency critical care and rehabilitation services.

Mr. Speaker, while some special interests and Her Majesty's loyal opposition will not recognize or acknowledge the investments that our government has made, and continues to make, towards public health care, Anthony Dale, the President and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association, praised our government's initiatives by saying, "The Ontario Hospital Association ... welcomes the investment ... announced" in the Ontario budget "to strengthen access to hospital services in 2022-23.

"The government of Ontario has been a strong funding partner throughout the COVID-19 crisis. The OHA greatly appreciates this continued support...." Let's continue to build on this momentum by implementing "long-term health services capacity planning ... to address the significant health human resource challenges facing our province...."

So, Mr. Speaker, I've only highlighted a few examples of the communities, people and businesses from across Ontario that will benefit from this plan to build and to invest in Ontario. The strength of our economy is not just on Bay Street, but also is on Main Street. It is on the main streets of small-town Ontario where local businesses thrive and where families live. Our economy is the main streets in Bowmanville and Belleville and Rainy River, from Cambridge and Waterloo to Tecumseh, Kenora, Brampton and all of Ontario in between. Our government's plan will help bring prosperity everywhere and for everyone.

I urge all members from all parties to support this important budget bill. It will help build Ontario, get Ontario working and will make this province the leader in growth, innovation and investment, and return Ontario to the level of prosperity our citizens expect and deserve.

Promises made, promises kept with this budget bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions to the member.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I really enjoyed the speech from the member for Durham, but I want to correct him on a couple things. The union in Unifor—that saved the auto sector. It was not the government of the province of Ontario. It was the province of Ontario that said that ship has sailed. The union never gave up, and when you do your speeches, you should recognize the workers in those plants.

Also, on long-term care: Let's be clear, 5,000 seniors died—parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. You know, last week, sir, 40 of our loved ones died, just last week, in long-term care. They had no air conditioning in their rooms. Close to 100 long-term-care facilities—residents got sick, some got heatstroke and they died.

So I guess my question to you is, why does your party continue to attack workers, and will your government repeal Bill 124 immediately? Our seniors need it to happen today.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Perhaps the member for Niagara Falls wasn't paying attention during the election campaign, where we pledged, among our five priorities, working for workers, standing up for workers. And he probably wasn't also paying attention when he saw the numerous union endorsements our pledges and our plan received, and that is a huge reason why we were re-elected with such a strong mandate and why the people—including hard-working workers, members of unions—voted for this plan and why we're implementing this plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Brampton West.

1750

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you to the member from Durham for his speech. Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 is a very important bill, especially when we're on our path to rebuild Ontario's economy, making life more affordable for all Ontarians, making unprecedented investments in health care, and making unprecedented investments in infrastructure—projects like Highway 413; Bradford Bypass; two-way, all-day GO; LRTs. Mr. Speaker, we're not leaving any stone unturned when it comes to investing in infrastructure, and also providing Ontarians with the most basic infrastructure; that is, connecting every household with high-speed Internet by 2025. This is how we're making life affordable for all Ontarians.

Can the member from Durham please highlight for the House how this bill will make life more affordable for Ontarians?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: This bill, if passed—and I urge all members of this House, including members of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, to read it and to recall that it's exactly what was pledged and promised and considered by the people of Ontario. This was a budget for the people to vote upon, and they did. It's a budget with a plan that affects everything from investments in health care to growing the economy. Because of that, we will have sufficient funding for important public sector works like health care and education, we will be able to afford to continue to keep costs down, and we will grow the economy with well-paying, high-paying jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, when we were elected in 2018, one of my first questions in this House was about long-term care and what was happening in long-term care. Specifically, I want to pick up on the issue of air conditioning. One of the things I shared was what was happening due to the extreme amount of heat and the fact that many of these homes don't have—forget climate control; they don't even have air conditioning just to survive. I asked the government to take action. Since 2018, this government was in power—a majority government. We're here again, and here we are talking about a moral document, a budget that talks about what kind of priorities are set out by this government.

So I want to ask the member, I want to ask this government—it's almost five years now since I asked that question, but even before that, we've had this crisis go on. Government after government has ignored what was happening in our seniors' care homes. So will this government finally address the crisis in long-term care? And why has it taken over four years to even get air conditioning in long-term-care homes?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: The answer calls for a little history lesson, particularly to correct the record of the member for St. Catharines.

Speaker, 2003 to 2018, 15 lost years—cuts to health care, lost jobs. We were given the trust of the people of Ontario in 2018 and received a bigger mandate in 2022. We're just getting started with the record investments, with the economic growth that's important to support those record investments. And what happened in those 15 years? The member opposite from St. Catharines doesn't seem to know that for three of those 15 years, the Liberal government was aided and abetted by the NDP, propped up by the third party, NDP. Shame on them. Shame on the Liberal government.

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

Hon. Stan Cho: I want to pick up where the member from Durham just left off. We're talking about long-term care. In 15 years, the Liberals and NDP, across the entire province, built 611 net new beds when it came to long-term care. Speaker, let me tell you what happened in Willowdale, because members opposite here are talking about, "Well, where are the results?" In just four years, in Willowdale, in my riding, 223 new beds at Carefree Lodge and improvements to 203—almost as much as in the entire province in the last 15 years combined.

Speaker, my question to the honourable member from Durham is, are those investments, which are clearly seen at budget.ontario.ca in the program expenditures, year-over-year increases—I see them—are we going to be able to hit that target of 30,000 net new beds in the province of Ontario?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Speaker, count on that. This government's track record in four short years is promises made, promises kept. We're just getting started. This is a government that says what it's going to do and does what it says. Count on that, to my colleague.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Ms. Doly Begum: Speaker, what's shameful is that there's a member opposite in the government who is bragging about having a majority—that failed to save thousands of lives during the pandemic. The fact that there were 40 seniors who died because they did not have air conditioning is something we should all be ashamed of, and we all should take responsibility for that. Honestly, there is no politics to that. You were given a mandate to come and represent the people. There is nothing to joke about—or to shame each other and try to spin something when there are people dying because they don't have air conditioning in the home.

The other member just talked about building thousands of rooms for seniors. If you have 2,000 rooms but they're locked up—people are feeling like they're living in prisons because they don't have proper food, they don't have air conditioning, they can't see their loved ones, and they don't have PSWs. Those are like prisons. There is nothing to brag about. So I feel angry, because that's what happened. We have thousands of people who died. Do you feel a little bit of shame for that, and do you want to brag about that? Maybe that's my question.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Speaker, I'm very new here, but I am part of a re-elected government and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of this government's track record in the first four years, when they were getting started, cleaning up the mess left behind by a Liberal government, supported by the NDP, which left us with these chronic problems.

We're just getting started. We're going to continue. So let's be non-partisan about it. I ask the member opposite and her colleagues to support this bill unanimously.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That's all the time we have for questions.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

Mr. Dave Smith: Point of order.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Peterborough-Kawartha has informed me that he has a point of order.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say a big happy birthday to my good friend the representative from Sarnia-Lambton, Mr. Bob Bailey. I won't say his age, but what I will say is, he's old enough to have celebrated the Leafs' last Stanley Cup with sparkling grape juice.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It being very close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1757.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Ted Arnott

Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Valerie Quioc Lim, Wai Lam (William) Wong,

Meghan Stenson, Christopher Tyrell

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

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Cho, Hon. / L'hon. Stan (PC)	Willowdale	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Ghamari, Goldie (PC)	Carleton	
Gill, Hon. / L'hon. Parm (PC)	Milton	Minister of Red Tape Reduction / Ministre de la Réduction des formalités administratives
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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harden, Joel (NDP)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Harris, Mike (PC)	Kitchener—Conestoga	
Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Holland, Kevin (PC)	Thunder Bay—Atikokan	
Hsu, Ted (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
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Karpoche, Bhutilla (NDP)	Parkdale—High Park	
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Martin, Robin (PC)	Eglinton—Lawrence	
McCarthy, Todd J. (PC)	Durham	
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McNaughton, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (PC)	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development / Ministre du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences
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Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
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Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
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Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
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Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
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Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
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Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	