

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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Lundi  
5 décembre 2022

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Speaker: Honourable Ted Arnott  
Clerk: Todd Decker

Président : L'honorable Ted Arnott  
Greffier : Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
OF ONTARIO

Monday 5 December 2022

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE  
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 5 décembre 2022

*The House met at 0900.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Good morning. Let us pray.

*Prayers.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Next we'll have a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

I want to acknowledge that we are meeting on lands traditionally inhabited by Indigenous peoples. We pay our respects to the many Indigenous nations who gathered here, and continue to gather here, including the Mississauga of the Credit. Meegwetch.

This being the first sitting Monday of the month, I will ask now that everyone remain standing and join in the singing of the Canadian national anthem, followed by the royal anthem.

*Singing of the national anthem / Chant de l'hymne national.*

*Singing of the royal anthem / Chant de l'hymne royal.*

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROGRESS ON THE PLAN TO BUILD  
ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2022

LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROGRESSION  
DU PLAN POUR BÂTIR  
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 36, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I look to the Minister of Finance to lead off the debate.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Mr. Speaker, today it gives me great pleasure to rise and speak to the third reading of the Progress on the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022. I will be splitting my time with my two terrific parliamentary assistants, the member for Oakville—where is he; he was right there—as well as the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

On November 14, I introduced the 2022 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review, and tabled our first-ever building Ontario progress report. This document and the fall bill highlight how our flexible and responsible plan is positioning Ontario to be ready to manage uncertainty and

risk as the world faces emerging economic challenges. It is my honour to continue to discuss the highlights and showcase how we have progressed on our plan to build and to spotlight the new targeted measures in the fall bill that further advance our plan in our fall economic statement. I'm pleased to say we have made significant progress on our plan to build.

Je suis heureux de dire que notre plan pour bâtir progresse fort bien.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislative changes and amendments are part of our government's plan to build Ontario. Our government is focused on getting things done. Our building Ontario progress report shows how we are making progress in attracting investments and creating good jobs. We have helped attract \$16 billion in transformative auto investments in electric vehicles and EV battery-manufacturing plants in Ontario over just the last two years. We have invested \$2.5 billion to help make Ontario a world-leading producer of, wait for it, low-carbon steel.

Our government is making progress in building Ontario's workforce by training and educating students and workers to succeed not only today but for tomorrow. We have added over 11,700 health care workers, including nurses and personal support workers, to our health care system.

We are building infrastructure by getting more shovels in the ground on critical projects right across the province. Because of the previous government's legacy of under-investment, Madam Speaker, we have had to make up for years of lack of investment. Today, Ontario needs many things. It needs highways. It needs transit. It needs hospitals. It needs more schools. We are building to ensure the province is a leader in Canada and globally.

Aujourd'hui, l'Ontario a besoin de beaucoup de choses. Il a besoin de routes et de plus de transports en commun. Il a besoin d'hôpitaux et de plus d'écoles. Nous bâtissons et travaillons à faire de cette province un chef de file au Canada et à l'échelle mondiale.

We are building more long-term-care homes and more schools and subways and highways, and I'm proud to report that today preliminary fieldwork is under way for Highway 413 and early construction has started for the Bradford Bypass, which will serve the rapidly growing communities of Simcoe county and York region and help ease traffic in the greater Ontario area.

Madam Speaker, every person and family in Ontario, no matter where they live, is benefiting from the measures our government has implemented to keep costs down. We eliminated licence plate renewal fees as well as licence plate stickers, and we refunded the past two years of fees

for eligible vehicles, helping to make life more affordable for nearly eight million vehicle owners in Ontario.

**0910**

We temporarily cut the gas tax and the fuel tax, starting on July 1, 2022, to further contribute to everyday household savings across Ontario.

The Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit is supporting eligible families with their child care expenses.

Madam Speaker, our government knows we need to address the current labour shortages seen in Ontario. That is why we are focused on supporting job creation and economic growth. Everyone who is able and wants to pursue a job should be able to reach their goal.

Our government recognizes the incredible potential in each and every person in our province, and people living with a disability should not be punished for working. That's why we are proposing to increase the amount a person on the Ontario Disability Support Program—also known as ODSP—can earn from \$200 to \$1,000 per month without impacting their income support. This measure would encourage people with a disability who want to increase their work hours to do so and promote more participation in the workforce while not penalizing them for doing so. It would allow the approximately 25,000 individuals currently in the workforce to keep more of their earnings and could encourage as many as 25,000 more to participate in the workforce.

Our government also recognizes that there are many ODSP recipients who cannot work, and they need our continued support. That is why in August we announced a 5% increase to ODSP rates and, going forward, we plan to adjust ODSP to a rate of inflation, beginning in July 2023. So when the cost of living increases, income support would increase as well. And as we increase support for ODSP recipients, we must also look at reforms so we can improve access and make sure those who need the support can get it faster.

Madam Speaker, we want job seekers to know they are not working alone. They have someone in their corner. That is why we're investing in skills training. Our Skills Development Fund is supporting groundbreaking programs that give people the skills and training and connections to find and harness new opportunities, and I am pleased to share that we are investing another \$40 million for the latest round of this program, bringing total funding for this round to \$145 million.

High school students are finding out that in Ontario today they can have a great life in the skilled trades or when working with children, and that is why we are also expanding the Dual Credit Program. This program is creating direct pathways for high school students and learners seeking a career in the trades or early childhood education. Through this program, students are getting the opportunity to complete credits towards both an Ontario secondary school diploma and a college credential or certificate of apprenticeship. This program is giving them the opportunity to begin work earlier. So there is a future in building Ontario.

Ce programme permet à ces étudiants de commencer à travailler plus tôt. Bâtir l'Ontario est porteur d'avenir.

Madam Speaker, I will now take a few moments to share thoughts about some of the pieces of legislative business contained in this bill and some new measures from our fall economic statement.

Our government is proposing to temporarily double the Ontario guaranteed annual income—or GAINS—payment so senior recipients could receive a maximum increase of almost \$1,000 per person in 2023. This temporary measure would last for 12 months, starting in January 2023, and is paid monthly. This step is one way we can help low-income seniors pay their costs.

Across the globe, everyone is facing a period of rising prices. During this period, it is important that Ontario helps those who need support the most. We understand the last thing people need is a tax increase at the pumps. That is why we are also proposing extensions to the cut to the gas and fuel tax rates to maintain the reduced tax rates at nine cents per litre. This extension would be until December 31, 2023. Through this measure, households would save \$195 on average between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023.

We are also proposing to extend the current freeze on the salaries of members of provincial Parliament.

**Interjection:** Thank you.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** I heard a thank you.

As well, we are proposing amendments to the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit. The proposed amendments to the Taxation Act, 2007, would expand eligible expenditures for the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit. We are proposing that eligible expenditures include location fees to help attract domestic and foreign film and television production to Ontario to help incentivize more on-location filming in communities across this great province.

In relation to the Securities Act, we are introducing rule-making authority to the access equals delivery initiative. This proposal shows how Ontario is moving ahead with modernizing the way public companies communicate with investors and the market to reduce regulatory burden and support the digitization of the economy.

We are also proposing amendments related to the framework for target-benefit pension plans. These proposed amendments are intended to clarify that written funding and governance policy would be required for target-benefit plans upon proclamation of the permanent framework, while also maintaining this requirement for other types of pension plans in the future.

One area where we are determined to advance progress is in attracting investment and bringing good manufacturing jobs back to Ontario. Our government is using the strength of Ontario's supply chains to support globally competitive homegrown manufacturing, and we are helping to see things built right here in Ontario, such as the next generation of hybrid and electric vehicles and batteries. Those batteries and those cars will be sold right across North America. Manufacturing, as many know, is Ontario's legacy and it is its future. Pour les vendre partout



en Amérique du Nord—le secteur manufacturier est à la fois l'héritage et l'avenir de l'Ontario.

This is why we are proposing the creation of a provincial clean energy credit registry. This new proposal would see the launch of a voluntary clean energy credit registry in 2023. A voluntary clean energy credit registry would help boost Ontario's competitiveness and attract jobs. It will also provide businesses with more options in how they pursue their environmental and sustainability goals. The voluntary clean energy credit registry is among the number of new things we are exploring as we make the province the destination of choice for global investors.

We are also focused on cutting red tape to help clear up supply chain delays, as well as supporting Ontario's agri-food system so we can get goods and services to customers faster and help create more jobs.

Madam Speaker, we understand that main street Ontario matters, and that is why we're proposing to increase the number of small businesses that could benefit from the small business tax rate. This change will lower costs for small businesses, providing \$185 million in income tax relief over the next three years.

Madam Speaker, our government is building Ontario's economy, building Ontario's workforce, building Ontario's infrastructure and keeping costs down for Ontario families and businesses. Each and every day, in every corner of our immense province, we are getting it done.

Et maintenir les coûts bas pour les familles et les entreprises—chaque jour, aux quatre coins de notre immense province, nous y parvenons.

But, Madam Speaker, we find ourselves in uncertain economic times. All around us, we are seeing emerging economic and fiscal challenges. Ontario is not an island; it is not immune to these pressures. In 2022, Ontario's consumer price index reached highs not seen since the early 1980s. We are seeing these 40-year price spikes because of the consequences of the worldwide pandemic and because of Russia's illegal war on Ukraine that is causing supply disruptions across various industries. And while inflation may have eased slightly, the Bank of Canada remains steadfast on the need for further interest rate increases.

0920

Madam Speaker, the cost of groceries and everyday goods that we all rely on continues to remain stubbornly high. Economic turbulence, economic uncertainty and challenges are surely going to continue in the months ahead. Understandably, Ontario seniors, families, workers and businesses are feeling financial pressure and are worried about their budgets. We know this reality is stressful for many. This is why we have built a flexible and responsible fiscal plan, one that takes a targeted approach as we navigate together these uncertain times. It's the right plan, because no matter what lies ahead, I am confident in our resiliency. Ontario's economy, its workers, its businesses and people are tough and resilient, and I have confidence in our plan.

Ontario is proud of its central place in Canada and the federation. Maintaining a close relationship with our federal and provincial partners remains critical as we continue

to build Ontario's economy during this difficult time. Ontario expects the federal government to be a full partner for the Ring of Fire, to respect provincial jurisdiction and, at minimum, to match Ontario's investments to support critical infrastructure in seizing this generational opportunity. It will happen. It can happen. It should happen.

Effective federal-provincial fiscal transfers are a key factor in Ontario's long-term fiscal sustainability. Canada and Ontario worked well together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring federal funding was timely and responsive to provincial needs. Over the next year, Ontario will be engaging with the federal government on a number of significant federal-provincial transfer agreements, from health to training to infrastructure. As Canada emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is opportunity and time to focus on long-term arrangements to create a principle-based transfer system, with agreements that are flexible, adequate and fair, and that respect provincial jurisdiction.

Notably, this includes the Canada Health Transfer. Ontario is looking forward to working with the provinces and territories and the federal government to secure an enhanced partnership that helps address the pressures facing the health care system now and provides a foundation for adequate long-term funding.

Awareness of these challenges and the need for resiliency informed our work preparing the 2022 fall economic statement and the fall bill. We are resolved to our task. To conclude, the policies and the measures I have discussed today, which are key in the fall bill and the 2022 fall economic statement, present a clear picture. We have a responsible, flexible plan that is helping businesses, helping workers, helping families and helping seniors across this province as we navigate this period of uncertainty together. Whatever the economic uncertainty may bring, our government has a plan.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would now like to pass it over to the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound to share more details on our government's plan.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you to the minister. Good morning, members. I am pleased to rise in the Legislature this morning as part of the third reading of the Progress on the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022. The people of Ontario deserve transparency and accountability when it comes to the acts and regulations and policies that may shape their lives. Openness, transparency and accountability are cornerstones of our government. Describing our plan for the people of Ontario to you today, as reflected in the third reading of the Progress on the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022, as well as our 2022 fall economic statement, demonstrates how our government is being open, transparent and accountable.

Ontario's Plan to Build: A Progress Update and the fall bill highlight how our flexible and responsible approach is positioning the province to be ready. The world faces economic headwinds, as well as emerging global changes and challenges, be they political, social, technological, business or health-related.

Since 2018, when our government was first elected, we have known that smarter and more efficient ways to manage the province's public service and finances were needed. We've also known that investments in the people and economy of Ontario were also needed to support our collective well-being and prosperity.

Madam Speaker, over the past few years, our province, and the rest of the world, have faced challenges to our well-being and our prosperity unlike any of us have seen in our lifetime. The once-in-a-generation COVID-19 pandemic tested our resolve as a people and as a province. Through these tough times we stood together, supported one another and we made it through. When COVID-19 caused global economic uncertainty, we were there to support the people of the province of Ontario, but our economic recovery from COVID-19 has been uneven.

Despite progress in recent quarters, the real GDP in some industries still remains below the levels seen before COVID-19 struck in early 2020. The arts, entertainment and recreation, transportation and warehousing and accommodation and food services are sectors seeing continued growth challenges. Certain other industries, such as retail, finance and insurance, have seen growth well above pre-COVID levels.

With this unevenness as a backdrop, today we find ourselves navigating yet another challenging period. Over the next couple of years, we're likely going to see economic turbulence. We recognize this, that the road ahead could be tough. We are not immune to what is being witnessed all across the globe.

In 2022 Ontario's consumer price inflation reached a near 40-year high. Rising prices and the risk of an economic slowdown in the very near term are very real. We are suffering from high inflation because of the consequences of a worldwide pandemic and how Russia's brutal war against Ukraine has impacted the whole world. Commodity prices have been impacted, fuelling inflation.

Here at home, we have seen rising interest rates and climbing prices of everyday goods. Families, seniors and the hard-working people of this province are feeling under financial pressure. It's easy to wake up and feel unease about that every day—what today may have in store, let alone think about what may be in store tomorrow. Our government understands this feeling. That's why we continue to offer meaningful support for workers, families, seniors, communities and businesses.

Instead of delivering broad, one-time support that could risk worsening our inflation, our government is thinking strategically and taking a different approach. We have introduced targeted measures that maintain our flexibility as we navigate the uncertainty that lies ahead, while supporting those who need it most.

We have a strong record of reducing red tape. Since 2018, the Ontario government has saved businesses \$576 million in annual compliance costs. Our common-sense changes include such things as removing licence plate renewal fees, extending liquor licences to outdoor patio spaces and updating other regulations across government to make it easier and cheaper to comply with the rules. In

total, Ontario's regulatory burden on businesses and individuals has been reduced by 6.5%

The pieces of legislative business contained in this proposed legislation help to address a world today that is full of uncertainty and challenges. To support seniors, so many of whom are on fixed incomes and are especially vulnerable during a time of rising inflation, we are proposing to temporarily double the Ontario guaranteed annual income payment. This will be a temporary measure for 12 months and would start next month, January 2023. This way, our government is able to help about 200,000 of the province's lowest-income seniors to meet their costs. During this time of rising prices, it is key that Ontario's government supports those who need it most. We are proposing an extension to the gasoline and fuel tax rate reductions under the Gasoline Tax Act and Fuel Tax Act. Cutting gas and fuel taxes is one way this government has worked to keep costs down. Putting more money back into the pockets of the people of Ontario is what this and similar cost-reduction measures are all about.

**0930**

In addition to being a parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, I'm the MPP for the great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you.

It is one of the largest rural ridings in southwestern Ontario and includes the beautiful and iconic Bruce Peninsula. Rural and northern communities are the backbone of this great province. Our government understands the unique way of life and unique challenges that come with living in municipalities outside the big urban centres.

Maintaining a close relationship with our municipal partners remains critical as we continue to build Ontario's economy during this time of economic uncertainty. We are working in partnership with them to build and strengthen our province. Our government has been increasing ongoing support to municipalities; for example, through doubling the annual investment in the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund program to \$400 million—that's an additional \$1 billion over five years—and investing up to \$15 million annually over five years in northern municipalities to support infrastructure projects through the Northern Ontario Resource Development Support Fund.

Ontario is also working closely with the federal government to ensure municipalities continue to receive financial support for the critical infrastructure they need to accommodate growth such as new roads, waterworks and transit, including through the new Housing Accelerator Fund. This is in addition to the support provided via the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, or OMPF. The OMPF targets funding to municipalities facing challenging fiscal circumstances and supports areas with limited property assessment.

Incentivizing more on-location filming in communities across Ontario by expanding the list of eligible expenditures for the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit is another way our government is working to support rural and northern communities. We are also proposing amendments to the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit,

under the Taxation Act, 2007. If this is approved, eligible expenditures would include location fees to help attract domestic and foreign film and television production to the province. It would also help incentivize more on-location filming in communities across Ontario, providing new business and opportunities for growth in rural communities.

Madam Speaker, now I'll pivot to Bay Street. In relation to the Securities Act, we are introducing rule-making authority in respect of the access equals delivery initiative. This proposal reflects the way we are modernizing how public companies communicate with investors and the market. This will both reduce the regulatory burden in the sector and further support the ongoing digitization of the Ontario economy.

Another proposal in the fall bill is creating a provincial clean energy credit registry. This proposed change would see the launch of a voluntary clean energy credit registry Ontario in 2023. The registry would help boost Ontario's competitiveness, attract jobs to the province and provide businesses with more choice in how they pursue their environmental and sustainability goals.

In the 2022 fall economic statement, the government announced that it intends to launch, this winter, a stakeholder consultation on proposed regulations necessary for implementing a permanent target benefit pension framework in Ontario. Target benefit pension plans are intended to provide a person with a monthly stream of income in retirement with predictable contributions for employers. These kinds of pension plans are especially good for workers in sectors with a high number of small businesses, where workers may work for a number of companies over their careers, often in the trades. If passed, we look forward to these consultations so the government can learn what tools can be implemented to help these industries better support their members and employees with good pensions.

As for business in the fall bill related to Queen's Park in the Legislature, we are also proposing to extend the freeze on salaries of members of provincial Parliament. You see, Madam Speaker, our government understands, everywhere they look, the people of Ontario see reasons to be concerned about the state of the world and their place in it. Our plan is flexible, responsible and focused on positioning the province to confront today's realities. We continue to offer many meaningful solutions to support workers and families.

We have introduced targeted measures allowing us to maintain our flexibility as we navigate the uncertainty that lies ahead. We understand that a core area of uncertainty is in the realm of personal budgeting and spending. That is why, to help keep costs down for families, in March, we eliminated the licence plate stickers and refunded drivers who had already paid the cost. This created savings to vehicle owners of an average of \$120 in southern Ontario and \$60 in northern Ontario each year. That is why we helped families and businesses by temporarily cutting the gas tax rate by 5.7 cents per litre and the fuel tax rate by 5.3 cents per litre, and we're proposing to extend this relief by another 12 months, until December 2023.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Hear, hear.

Statistics Canada reported that these tax cuts contributed to the drop in gas prices in Ontario, which we saw in July, and it helped lower the rate of the overall consumer price index this summer as well.

Another one of our measures, the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit, is supporting eligible families with up to 75% of their eligible child care expenses. This credit is providing, on average, \$1,250 in child care support for this year. These targeted measures are helping to keep costs down for families and businesses.

Ontario is no exception when it comes to the ongoing labour shortages and supply chain disruptions. The challenge is getting goods and services across our province or around the world. It's a contributing factor to the higher-than-usual inflation. That is why we are seizing opportunities every day.

We are helping to develop the Ring of Fire and capitalize on Ontario's critical minerals, which remain a strategic necessity for all of Canada. A key part of our Critical Minerals Strategy is the corridor of prosperity, the roads to the Ring of Fire. These roads will help bring critical minerals to the manufacturing hubs in southern Ontario, which will help bring prosperity to northern Ontario and help unlock economic potential.

We are building roads, bridges, subways and highways to make sure people, goods and services can move freely and boost our economy.

We've invested in the province's automotive and manufacturing supply chains, making Ontario a North American leader in building electric and hybrid vehicles and battery manufacturing. Through strong and prudent economic management, we can attract investment and remain a leader in steel manufacturing and other industries.

**0940**

Attracting more Ontario investment means we need more skilled Ontario workers. Our government has provided support so that thousands of workers can train for the skilled trades and rewarding careers, workers who can help build the critical infrastructure we are investing in all across Ontario. As you can see, this measured and sensible approach is supporting workers and businesses in a targeted way. This leaves government room to build as Ontario navigates emerging challenges.

Madam Speaker, I will close by saying this: Our government has a plan that is ready for whatever uncertain economic times may come Ontario's way. We are rebuilding the economy and bringing good-paying manufacturing jobs back to the province. We are getting shovels in the ground to build highways, hospitals, transit and other key projects that will give a boost to our economy and bring improvements to the day-to-day lives of the people of Ontario. By investing in skills training and helping recent immigrants and newcomers put their skills and talents to use, we are working for the workers of Ontario. Together we have been getting it done. We have more work to do. Let's get it done. Let's build Ontario.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further debate?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** It's an honour to be able to speak in the Legislature today, to follow the Minister of Finance and my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, the parliamentary assistant as well to Finance.

I rise to speak to the third reading of the Progress on the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022. As demonstrated by the fall economic statement and the fall bill that is before us now, our government is taking an approach like no other. We are building Ontario's economy and we are attracting investments and good jobs to our province. We are building Ontario's workforce by ending the stigma against being employed in the skilled trades. We are building key infrastructure for Ontario, getting shovels in the ground on critical projects across our province. And we are keeping costs down, putting more money back in the pockets of people, where it belongs.

For example, to reduce costs, we are making changes that would allow a person with a disability on the Ontario Disability Support Program to keep more of the money they earn by increasing their monthly earnings exemption from \$200 to \$1,000 per month. We heard in the committee stage from employers that this will have a positive impact on workers and businesses. Businesses are short of labour and many folks who are not able to work to the extent that they wanted to will now be excited to be able to work and keep more money.

We are also investing an additional \$40 million in 2022-23, for a total of \$145 million, for the latest round of funding in the Skills Development Fund, to help the businesses that are driving Ontario's economic growth to hire, train and retain workers.

Starting in 2023-24, we are investing an additional \$4.8 million over two years to expand the Dual Credit Program so more secondary school students are encouraged to enter a career in the skilled trades or early childhood education.

We are also providing Ontario small businesses with \$185 million in income tax relief over the next three years. To support eligible small businesses, we are now automatically matching municipal property tax reductions for small businesses within all municipalities that adopt the small business property subclass.

Together, Ontario has come far. We have stood together through tough times and got through them together. A growing economy and new jobs are the best ways to support the province's path to balance and long-term prosperity.

When faced with a degree of uncertainty, governments need to be ready for anything. Governments need to be flexible and forward-thinking. We have a fiscal plan that is ready to support people and businesses when and if the time comes.

As our progress update and the fall bill illustrate, we remain committed to managing Ontario's finances responsibly and transparently while maintaining our commitment to support the people of Ontario during these uncertain times. The Ministry of Finance is working, along with the Treasury Board, to manage the province's \$198.8-billion budget and to oversee our \$186.8 billion in revenues through taxation, business enterprises and non-tax revenue. Our government is making record investments in the

priorities that matter to every family, worker and senior in Ontario. This is not an easy task, but our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is getting it done. We remain strategic, responsible and measured when it comes to how we support the people of this province.

In the province's 2022 fall economic statement, Ontario's real GDP is projected to rise by 2.6% in 2022, then by 0.5% in 2023, 1.6% in 2024 and 2.1% in 2025. These projections are prudently set slightly below the average of private sector forecasts due to uncertain global economic conditions. Ontario's economy will continue to see growth in the near term, but growth is projected to slow significantly, below 2% in 2023 and 2024. This is something we are thinking about today because the province must remain agile and responsive to any short-term instability while also thinking about our long-term plans for growth.

Ontario's net debt-to-GDP ratio is now forecast to be 38.4% in 2022-23. This is a decrease of three percentage points compared with the forecast of 41.4% in the 2022 budget. While this has been an improvement, we anticipate that economic uncertainty could cause the net debt-to-GDP ratio to rise in the near term. We are making sure we proceed in a cautious way. Right now, paying interest on the province's debt remains Ontario's fourth-largest expense. That's billions of dollars that could be invested in public services and programs.

That is why our government has taken prudent steps in our 2022 fall economic statement. We are making record investments in the priorities that matter to the people of this province: building infrastructure, training workers and keeping costs down for families and businesses.

Speaker, one of the ways we're working to keep costs down while fostering economic growth in our time of global uncertainty is in the regulated sector of auto insurance. The main way we do that is through the provincial regulatory agency, the Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario or FSRA for short.

Insurance companies are crucial to Ontario's continued economic vitality and growth. Just the other week, I spoke at an auto insurance sector event. I reiterated to the audience what Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy said in the 2022 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review: that the province is facing economic uncertainty, like the rest of the world. You see, many sectors, like the insurance industry, are experiencing challenging market conditions. In the face of these challenges, they must continue to meet the needs of their Ontario insurance customers. Insurance companies are also seeing the stubbornly high costs that businesses and consumers are seeing across the board. They see it through their high claims costs. And the year ahead is likely to be marked by ongoing economic turbulence and an economy-wide slowdown in growth.

#### **0950**

To help keep costs down in this part of the economy, in the spring of 2020, we took quick and targeted action to enable financial relief for drivers. FSRA has reported that those actions have allowed over \$1.8 billion in consumer savings since March 2020. We are continuing to work with FSRA on our commitment to improve auto insurance and

reduce the cost to families across Ontario. We are creating more choices for consumers and developing strong anti-fraud measures in the auto insurance system.

Our government is also working with FSRA to develop a new framework for ensuring fairness in rates that would replace outdated guidance, including on existing territorial rating.

Speaker, the Ministry of Finance is responsible for not only overseeing Ontario's auto insurance sector, but also, of course, overseeing the province's finances. As noted in the fall economic statement, our government is projecting a deficit of \$ 12.9 billion in 2022-23. That is nearly \$7 billion lower than the outlook published in the 2022 budget. However, over the medium term, our government is projecting deficits of \$8.1 billion in 2023-24 and \$0.7 billion in 2024-25. This shrinking number could get our province back on track for a balanced budget. This approach demonstrates our ongoing effort aimed at eliminating the province's structural deficit in the face of numerous challenges over the past couple of years.

Revenues in 2022-23 are projected to be \$186.8 billion. That is \$7 billion higher than forecasted in the 2022 budget. The increase in revenue is predominantly due to higher-than-expected 2021 taxation revenues. This revenue and deficit situation will help our government and the people of Ontario, because as a responsible government, we are making sure that we preserve the flexibility necessary in case of unforeseen events while continuing to implement our long-term plan to invest in the people of Ontario.

We know the economic road ahead may not be easy for our government or the people of Ontario. In the face of persistent inflation and more economic turbulence, we must promote stability by remaining flexible, responsive and strategic. We simply cannot ignore fiscal challenges that may be on the horizon and embark on a massive spending spree. This would only worsen inflation. Our government spared no expense to protect and support the people of Ontario throughout the COVID pandemic, but now is the time for us to show restraint. More provincial spending will only drag out an economic downturn.

I know many people from all walks of life are concerned about a possible economic downturn. Our government is focused on making sure Ontario is in a strong position to manage risks while remaining supportive of the people in this great province of Ontario. Whatever economic uncertainty may bring, we have a plan.

Our first-ever Building Ontario Progress Report shows many of our recent accomplishments, including attracting \$16 billion in transformative automotive investments over the last two years to help Ontario become a North American leader in electric and hybrid vehicle building and battery manufacturing. And in my riding of Oakville alone, the Ford of Canada plant is being retooled to build electric vehicles so that Ontario will not only build electric vehicles but will actually be a global hub of electric vehicles, with essential manufacturing and critical minerals all located right here in our province. Indeed, later today Premier Ford is in Ingersoll, Ontario, to have

another announcement in the province of Ontario related to electric-vehicle manufacturing.

Attracting these investments didn't come by luck; it came by putting in the proper policies, the proper framework to attract investment. From 2003 to 2018, our great province saw over 300,000 manufacturing jobs leave our province, but by reducing red tape, reducing the cost of electricity for major manufacturers, by creating the right regime for business to flourish, Ontario is now attracting net investments, and we will be a global leader.

Ontario has also attracted investments of \$2.5 billion over the past year, which will support the transformation in the steel sector and help make us a world-leading producer of clean steel. In both Hamilton and Sault Ste. Marie, our government is helping industry adapt and modernize so that Ontario is a leader not only in steel manufacturing but in clean steel manufacturing. We should be proud of the investments we're making and the environmental impact that will come out as a result of that.

We are also supporting \$8.7 billion in cost savings and support for Ontario businesses in 2022, with \$4 billion going to small businesses.

We have also added over 11,700 health care workers, including nurses and personal support workers, since 2020.

We've also committed \$25.1 billion in highway expansion and rehabilitation over the next 10 years so our communities are connected, gridlock is reduced, goods and people keep moving across the province. Our government is committed to getting people from A to B more quickly and safely by investing in subways, GO trains, roads and bridges, ensuring the people of Ontario spend less time commuting and more time with their families, their loved ones. Ensuring businesses can get goods and products to market quickly and safely has certainly been a goal of the government of Ontario.

I am confident that the Progress on the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022, and our fall economic statement demonstrate this government's strong track record and well-considered projections for the future of this province. We are making progress, Speaker, building what this rapidly growing province wants and desperately needs: hospitals, long-term-care homes, schools, subways and highways.

Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the third reading of the Progress on the Plan to Build Act (Budget Measures), 2022, as well as discuss the 2022 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review, Ontario's Plan to Build: A Progress Update. As shown in the fall economic statement and the fall bill before us today, our government is taking an approach like no other. Together, we have provided cost savings and support for Ontario businesses through actions such as lowering payroll costs, providing relief from electricity prices and taxes, and cutting red tape. These are the kinds of issues you may not see on the front page of the paper every single day, but they are critically important to ensuring businesses succeed and new investment is put into the province of Ontario. These are actions taken to increase Ontario's competitiveness, strengthen provincial supply chains and make government services easier to access and interact with.

Our responsible, targeted plan demonstrates how we have been able to maintain a strong record of fiscal management while remaining responsive to the people of Ontario. It is the right plan to help families, seniors, workers and small businesses weather the economic challenges we may face.

**1000**

Despite what may be on the horizon, I have confidence in Ontario's economy, its businesses, its workers and its people.

We are committed to laying a strong and resilient fiscal foundation for future generations. We know that when our government took office, in June 2018, Ontario was the most indebted subsovereign government in the entire world. That was the legacy we were left with. That's why the people of Ontario voted for a Progressive Conservative majority government back in 2018—for the future generations, to ensure we had economic stability and prosperity, to ensure we had the financial path to be able to support great education, great health care, great transportation. We needed that in order to secure our future. And once again, of course, we were elected in 2022 with an even larger mandate, to support that same policy plan.

We've laid out a path of economic prosperity for everyone in Ontario, despite what challenges may come our way. This government recognizes the potential in every person who calls Ontario home. We are responsibly managing government spending and ensuring financial integrity. We want to get through these uncertain times better and stronger than ever to ensure Ontario remains the best place for people to call home. We are building a stronger province—a province with a strong economy and good-paying jobs.

We've increased the minimum wage for workers in the province of Ontario to support lower-paid workers.

We want to be a province where anyone can start and grow a business. That's why we are a government that actually opened and supported the Ministry of Red Tape Reduction to help get rid of duplicative regulations. Ontario has over 300,000 regulations. We have more red tape and regulations than any jurisdiction in the world. Our government is removing those that are duplicative, those that are unnecessary, those that are burdensome, to support families and individuals in this province, so we continue to make our province the best place to live, work and raise a family.

We want to be a province where everyone feels connected through highways, new roads and more reliable public transit. The largest transportation infrastructure investment in the history of Canada is being led by our government to build subways throughout Toronto, but, beyond that, to expand and electrify the GO network to regions outside of Toronto and the GTA and beyond; to build roads, bridges, highways supporting the 413. Individuals and families are supportive of this, but so are businesses. They know that the Toronto and GTA highways are among the most congested anywhere in North America. People looking into our province see a great talent pool of people. Toronto, the GTA—in fact, all of Ontario—is a

hub for electric vehicle manufacturing in the future, but also for finance and technology. We have some of the most innovative and exciting companies in the world. But if people can't commute in a responsible and reasonable time, if they can't afford a house to live in those communities, if they can't get safely and quickly from A to B, they're not going to want to live here, and we're not going to be able to attract the best and the brightest. So our government is committed to getting people connected through public transportation as well as highways, subways and bridges.

Our goal, of course, is to have a province where you can build a career and raise a family, to make it affordable. Our government has been committed to making life affordable, whether it's the child care tax credit, whether it's reducing the licence sticker fees that my colleague talked about earlier, helping save families hundreds of dollars, in many cases, per year.

The economic challenges before Ontario may not be for an easy road, and there are some things we cannot predict. Ontario is not an island; we are subject to the world's economy. But by remaining flexible, we can overcome any challenges and make Ontario a better place.

I'm confident in our plan and proud of the significant progress our government has made on our plan to build. I certainly hope that the opposition will see all the good that is in the fall economic statement here, and even if they may disagree with some things and typically not vote to support the government—I understand they have a role as opposition. But I hope they'll see the good in the fall economic statement here, the good that we're doing for those that are on ODSP, for the seniors, for the businesses, and support the fall economic statement.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** It is now time for questions.

**MPP Jamie West:** Thank you to the Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistants for their debate. One of the things the bill talks about a lot is how difficult it is to make ends meet, and one of the things that concerns me is that people on social assistance, ODSP and OW—I know they'll talk about increasing allowable earnings and the 5% increase to ODSP. In OW, there was no increase at all.

What I want to draw attention to is that the poverty line in Ontario is \$19,930. OW yearly makes \$12,478, and ODSP with the 5% increase will make \$15,472.80. Are the minister and parliamentary assistants comfortable with this massive deficit, recognizing these people will be below the poverty line by a substantial amount for the next four years?

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I thank the member for his question. A lot has been talked about ODSP, and we on this side of the House are very proud of three major measures we're doing to this program:

(1) We've increased it by 5%, as you well know. That's a major change, something that hasn't been done before, and that's now in the books.

(2) Indexing it to inflation, beginning in July of next year, and that again will connect ODSP payments to inflation—a fundamental change.

(3) The measure in this fall economic statement of increasing the income threshold from a monthly level of \$200 to \$1,000 is a game-changer. We heard from committee representatives in the finance committee first-hand how powerful that will be, and we're looking forward to seeing that as an effective change, if this bill is passed.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** This past Friday, I had the honour of having Premier Ford and the finance minister out to my riding. One of the stops was the skills development centre at Durham College. Both speakers spoke about the importance of skills development in our province. Could the member from Oakville speak a little bit more broadly about how the legislation proposes to address the labour shortage in the province of Ontario, particularly as it relates to the skilled trades?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to the member from Whitby—a very good question.

We understand that in the province of Ontario there's an enormous skills gap. We are missing economic growth that we potentially could have if we had a match of skills to jobs. There is an enormous shortage of skilled workers here in Ontario, and the Skills Development Fund specifically supports innovative training projects that upskill workers and job seekers, including apprentices, preparing them for meaningful careers.

The first two rounds of funding delivered 388 training projects, helping more than 393,000 workers in the next step of their career for in-demand industries. So by bridging the gap, by encouraging young people, supporting workers, transitioning workers from perhaps sectors that they no longer feel comfortable in or would like to adapt to, we are encouraging that skills mismatch to be reduced.

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**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** I have a question for our colleagues. I heard, many times in this allocution, the government say how responsible a government they are.

Well, let me remind you that you're also signatory to Treaty 9. If you talk about responsibility, you need to address the water advisories. You need to address the housing crisis. When you have communities that are two, three generations living in a single dwelling, communities that can't expand because of government issues, these issues need to be addressed. Responsible governments would recognize that they need to fix these issues.

I'd like to hear the colleagues across: What have they done to address that, if they're a responsible government?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to the member opposite. This morning, we're specifically speaking about the fall economic statement. No doubt, the issues that you raised may not specifically be in this particular bill. However, we have, for example, Bill 23 that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has brought through, which certainly encourages the building of affordable housing. In fact, we've lowered or reduced development fees, for example, on not-for-profit housing, on affordable

housing. That will certainly help make housing more affordable to those in need. That's certainly one of the aspects that we are doing to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Further questions?

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's always nice to see you in the chair.

We've talked about building and what our government has done—we're building hospitals, we're building long-term-care beds, we're building the much-needed transit here for the people of Toronto. But I just wanted to ask the parliamentary assistants, what are we doing to help support our seniors? Some of our seniors are living on a fixed income. During this time of rising costs of living and economic uncertainty, can you tell us how they fit into this plan?

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I thank the member for her great question. It's so important, how we're supporting seniors, and this government is doing that in a number of different ways. One of the things we're doing immediately is to help vulnerable seniors by proposing to double the Guaranteed Annual Income System payment, GAINS—that's right, double those payments—starting next month in January 2023. It would support about 200,000 of Ontario's lowest-income seniors. This is such an important measure, and it's going to those that need it. This is what this government has done with these targeted measures in the fall economic statement to benefit those most in need.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the member for Kiiwetinoong.

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** It's always an honour to be able to get up and speak on behalf of the people of Kiiwetinoong, especially on the fall economic statement.

There seems to be a lot of talk about the Ring of Fire, but also there's lots of talk about how Ontario is the best place to call home. It all depends on where you live. I know, when you talk about the Ring of Fire, you're talking about working with two First Nations, and there are so many First Nations in the surrounding area of the Ring of Fire. That's exactly what colonizers do; that's a very colonial approach. When are you going to start talking to other First Nations? When are you going to stop being very colonial?

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to the member opposite. You do raise a good point. You mentioned that not all of Ontario is sharing the prosperity. Although we are one of the most prosperous provinces of one of the most prosperous countries in the world, there isn't entirely a path to prosperity for everyone. You've brought up northern Ontario, for example, and parts of northern Ontario where there is a lot more poverty and a lot more social problems as a result of that. So our government is committed to building the Ring of Fire not only to help support the global environment, to help make the world a better place from an environmental point of view, to help industry, but to support northern communities and to help those northern communities. That is a path forward out of poverty for northern communities.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** Final question.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I realize we're running out of time, so I'll be very quick with my question.

This province is facing an infrastructure deficit. My question to the PAs is if they could they advise us, please, how the proposed measures in this legislation fit into this government's larger plan to build Ontario and invest in the priorities that matter to the people of this province, from infrastructure, roads and schools to hospitals.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I thank the member for his question. Governments have always, in the past, had a shorter-term focus: "Let's try and deal with what's next week or next month." This government has a long-term focus, especially in infrastructure, with a record 10-year plan for \$158 billion, the biggest investment ever in transit, which will be fundamental to the economy and the environment, frankly; health care, with a \$40-billion investment; education; long-term care, and on and on and on. This government is there to build infrastructure for the people of Ontario.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Donna Skelly):** We've run out of time for questions and answers. It's now time for members' statements.

*Third reading debate deemed adjourned.*

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### SKILLS TRAINING

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** Syncreon is an automotive company which employs people in Essex county and in the surrounding areas. Syncreon does work for Stellantis, but in July of this year, Stellantis announced that they were going to bring some of that work back into the Stellantis shops, and that means about 300 syncreon employees have now been displaced.

But they have hope, and that's because a new labour action centre has been opened for those syncreon automotive workers. The labour action centre offers a holistic approach to job-seeking, with peer-to-peer support from people who come directly from the ranks of syncreon. The centre will provide vital community support and direct assistance and will help syncreon employees with new employment, retraining and upgrading of their skills.

The new labour action centre is a partnership between the Ontario government and Unifor. The Ontario government is putting in \$360,000, and Unifor is making an in-kind contribution of \$45,000.

I want to thank the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development for his support, and I want to join him in saying that we will never stop working for workers.

### ROAD SAFETY

**MPP Jill Andrew:** On November 23, Kartik Saini, a 20-year-old international student, was struck, dragged and

killed in my community at Yonge and St. Clair by a Ford F-250 pickup truck.

Kartik was a cyclist. He was riding his bike home that day. He deserved to get home safely. All road users, including vulnerable road users, deserve to get home safely. They do not have two tonnes of steel protecting them.

On November 30, a ghost bike memorial ride was organized with hundreds from the cycling community and allies in attendance to honour Kartik.

Speaker, we must have tougher road safety rules to save lives. We must implement a Vision Zero provincial road safety strategy, to reduce deaths and injuries on Ontario's roads to zero. Make the Fairness for Road Users Act and the Protecting Vulnerable Road Users Act law today to help families and communities find justice and some comfort, if that is ever possible. These laws will make our roads safer for all.

I want to thank Cycle Toronto; Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists; the bicycle mayor of Toronto; Bells on Yonge; Centre for Active Transportation; Toronto Community Bikeways Coalition; the Bike Brigade; Darnel Harris, ED of Our Greenway; Robin Richardson of Yonge4All, and so many others who are leaders advocating for safe roads for vulnerable users and overall low-carbon modes of transportation, like walking, biking and taking transit.

Yonge4All has been appealing for our midtown Toronto Yonge complete street pilot to be permanent. Complete streets are safer streets that take into account the needs of all users. I support their work because everyone deserves to get home safely.

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### WINDREACH FARM

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** WindReach Farm in my riding strives to enrich the lives of persons of all ages with special needs by providing opportunities to enjoy experiences in farming, nature, outdoor recreation and other activities, and to share those experiences with family and friends.

This past Saturday, I joined the hard-working staff from the farm and its many supporters from across the region of Durham to celebrate the 33 years that WindReach has provided impactful programs and services. I believe that the heart of any community like Whitby resides in the people who create ongoing, meaningful change and the support of those who need extra care and attention. Days like today, when we're celebrating the 33 years, are a celebration of WindReach Farm's history, but they're also a chance to rededicate ourselves to the future, to ensure that WindReach Farm continues to be a safe place for those with physical, emotional and intellectual disabilities.

Speaker, as their member of provincial Parliament, I dedicate myself to continuing the great work of WindReach Farm.

### MUNICIPAL PLANNING

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** This morning, I was in committee on Bill 39, debating one of the most unsettling and troubling



bills that has passed through this Legislature in decades. Bill 39 is an attack on the fundamental tenets of representative democracy, on citizen voice, on citizen say. By giving mayors permission to pass laws with just one third of votes, the Premier has made it clear that representative democracy and majority rule don't matter much to him. And it won't just stop in Toronto and Ottawa—minority rule could come to any municipality in Ontario, through regulatory decree.

We are living through a time when democracy is under threat. Who would have thought that the greatest threat to democracy here in Ontario would come from the Premier?

This bill will make Ontario an appalling first. No democratic government across North America makes rules using minority rule except for us.

Bill 39 is an attack on farmland and our greenbelt. We are one of seven regions in the world that grows more food than we need. In this era of climate crisis and food insecurity, our farmland should be expanded, not paved over—but paving over is exactly what this government is doing, by hiving off a section of the greenbelt for development owned by some of the government's largest PC donors, giving them the opportunity to make untold profit at our expense.

We can do better than this. Homes are for people. Democracy is for all of us. Repeal Bill 39.

#### DRIVER EXAMINATION CENTRES

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** This morning, I'm proud to share some amazing news for the great people of Brampton. Our government is committed to improving and innovating the way we provide services to people across the province, which is why I'm so proud to announce that our government is implementing a new remote queueing pilot project that is aimed at streamlining and innovating our DriveTest centres, addressing current wait times and improving the customer experience. This pilot project will start with DriveTest Brampton and in a matter of days expand to DriveTest Toronto Metro East. This will allow customers to join the queue for services prior to arriving at DriveTest Brampton and track their place as well as the estimated wait time. These new changes now mean that the residents of Brampton will no longer have to wait in line and will be updated with an SMS text message as they approach the front of the queue. Under the pilot, customers can join the queue simply by clicking a link available on the DriveTest website.

Speaker, this good news doesn't just end here. We're also expanding the hours of operation of DriveTest Brampton and increasing the number of customer service agents to further reduce wait times and queues.

Our government is committed to reducing wait times and innovating services, and this is a government that is getting it done for the people of Brampton and for the people of Ontario.

#### INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Meegwetch, Speaker. *Remarks in Oji-Cree.*

I rise today and stand in solidarity with Grassy Narrows as they celebrated the 20th anniversary of their successful logging blockade on December 2.

This logging blockade was an action of land protection for members of Grassy Narrows. Elders, youth, community and council members showed up to say no to unwanted resource development. They stopped loggers on the highway in the middle of winter to protect their lands. The people of Grassy Narrows have seen first-hand the effects that clear-cut logging was having on their treaty territories. Since then, they have prevented industrial logging on their 7,000-square-kilometre homeland that saved over 15 million trees and helped build the movement for Indigenous sovereignty and "land back."

Also, Grassy Narrows has suffered from environmental degradation due to the dumping of mercury in the English and Wabigoon Rivers in the 1960s. These actions poisoned their water, damaged the environment, and they paid in full with ongoing health consequences for the people today.

Free, prior and informed consent are more than just words. They are actions. Solidarity with Grassy Narrows land defenders. Meegwetch.

#### FOOD DRIVES

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Good morning, everyone. What do you think of when you imagine holiday dinner? Golden turkey with fluffy mashed potatoes and gravy, latkes with sour cream and apple sauce? Unfortunately, food won't make it to the tables of all Ontarians for the holidays this year: 16.1% of Ontarian households face food insecurity, and that number is, sadly, only growing.

This problem has only accelerated in recent years. In beautiful Beaches–East York, the crisis has many turning to food banks, which have been seeing a record number of people coming out to use their services. More than ever, food banks need our help so they can serve our communities best. I'm proud to showcase some of the organizations in my riding:

—Grant AME Church provides food hampers to over 250 families in need every Christmas and is currently accepting donations of food, personal care items, diapers, toys, gift cards and monetary donations.

—Community Centre 55's Share a Christmas program serves over 100 families. This year, they are looking for new and unwrapped toys, monetary donations, and gift cards for teens.

—Grace Pascoe Care Centre at Cavalry Baptist Church has been operating for over 60 years and is accepting food and monetary donations for hampers.

During this season and all year round, we must choose compassion and show kindness to others. My team and I will be volunteering at and making donations to food banks in our neighbourhood over the break, and we welcome you to do so too with your teams. Thank you and happy holidays, and thanks for listening so intently.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** An alumni friend's son, David, recently died while studying at university. His parents are overcome by their loss. My heartfelt condolences to David's family and friends.

Speaker, David was an exceptional child, full of potential. Suicide robbed him of the future he richly deserved. Sadly, he is not alone. David's parents hope this story will prevent other tragedies.

The weight of academic and social expectations may feel crushing to vulnerable youth. We must pay attention to their struggles. First-year college or university students are often away from the security of home for the first time. The pressure to achieve success is overwhelming.

Speaker, I call on high schools, universities, colleges, families and peers to all take action to support our youth and arm them with the tools of resilience and hope.

Our government is ready to play a role as well. Students in need of help can find it at any one of 22 youth wellness hubs across Ontario. These hubs offer mental health and addictions supports, social services navigation and primary care service to anyone aged 12 to 25, all on a walk-in basis. They offer our youth a safe space to express themselves and speak about their issues. Their lives may depend on it.

1030

## EVENTS IN ETOBICOKE-LAKESHORE

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** You know, the weather outside is frightful, but this House is so delightful—well, most days, anyway, which is why I'm pleased to buck up the festive spirit in this place and share some holiday tidings from the great riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. Before I do that, I want to give a shout-out to my uncle Robert who is watching today, because I know he's with my mom this week. Thanks for your help, Uncle Robert.

Over these last special weeks we've had a tree lighting at the Kingsway BIA.

Next, this past weekend—oh, it was a busy one—on Saturday I walked the 32nd Lakeshore Santa Claus Parade. Thanks to the volunteers and the families who braved the wind and rain—and oh, did it rain—to wait to see Santa Claus.

Next it was off to the Skate with Santa and the Franklin Horner Christmas Market, where I purchased some great gifts; and then off to Great Lakes Brewery for the Hops for Hunger Food Drive and holiday market, where a dollar from each sale of white eggnog stout was generously donated to the Daily Bread Food Bank.

Lastly, this holiday message wouldn't be complete without a shout-out to our great staff in our constituency offices and the team here at Queen's Park. I would like to mention one staff member in particular, Joe Garisto, who has created Christmas cards, calendars and countless communication pieces for all of the Ontario PC caucus members and our leaders for the past 36 years. Joe, thank

you for your dedicated work, your service with a smile. You have always been there when I needed you, even when I show up in your office with that last-minute request. Thank you. You have never let me down. Thank you for your service.

In closing, Mr. Speaker: The season is slowly ending and there's no election pending. Point of order before I go: Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.

## DARCY MCKEOUGH

**Mr. Trevor Jones:** As a lifelong learner I find it fascinating to listen to the tributes offered by colleagues on behalf of our former members. It's in this spirit that I want to offer my sincere gratitude to one of our most esteemed past colleagues and living legends, who continues to contribute by sharing his unique experiences and offering sage, relevant advice on a wide variety of topics to many of our members in this House.

Few people have served this province as well and as nobly as the Honourable Darcy McKeough. Born in Chatham on January 31, 1933, he remains active in the community and closely follows politics and current events from his lovely home, Bally McKeough, in beautiful Cedar Springs, Chatham-Kent.

Elected MPP five times between 1963 and 1977, McKeough was mockingly dubbed "the duke of Kent" by opposition members and has worn that title as a badge of honour ever since. As Treasurer of Ontario, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Energy during his time in office, McKeough created regional governments to bring more efficient services to our citizens and fought to achieve budget surpluses long before they were fashionable.

I feel fortunate for my friendship with my honourable predecessor and privileged to continue to glean insights from his lived experiences, a gentleman who is so delightful in any social setting and who continues to offer highly relevant solutions to contemporary matters with a level of competence, kindness and charm that I hope to one day aspire to. Thank you, Darcy, for continuing to contribute to our communities.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** We have with us in the Speaker's gallery today the consul general of Chile in Toronto, Mr. Fernando Morales Godoy. He is accompanied by Matias Ahumada. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests to the Legislature.

**Hon. David Piccini:** It gives me great honour to acknowledge our page captain today, Alex Vanden Bosch, who is from my riding of Northumberland-Peterborough South, who hails from Grafton. She's joined in the gallery by her parents, Irina and Justin; and Sue and Tim, her grandparents.

You have an outstanding granddaughter and daughter. Welcome to Queen's Park. It's an honour to have you here.

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** I'd like to welcome today an incredible community leader from beautiful Beaches–East York. He was instrumental in delivering vaccinations when we were in the extreme heat of the pandemic. He was a huge volunteer; an incredible, sensational person: Bruce Pausey.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** I would like to introduce representatives from Queen's University who are here today: Dr. Patrick Deane, the principal and vice-chancellor; Owen Crawford-Lem, the rector; Craig Leroux, director of government and corporate relations; Dr. Nancy Ross, vice-principal of research; and Ann Tierney, vice-provost and dean of student affairs. Thank you for being here at Queen's Park.

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** I don't believe she is here yet, but this morning we will be joined by one of my constituents from the great riding of Brampton North: Cheryl Crompton. It is also her birthday today.

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** I'd like to add my welcome and introductions to my friends and neighbours who are visiting from Queen's University, located in the great riding of Kingston and the Islands—and I know that there are many alumni of Queen's here in this chamber. I invite everybody to meet with Queen's later at the reception, if not in your offices, to understand the contribution of our post-secondary institutions to our society, to our economy, and to find out what they would like to see us do to help them contribute even more.

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson:** Today, I'd like to welcome the Grain Farmers of Ontario to Queen's Park. In particular, from District 2, the great area of Chatham-Kent, I'd like to welcome Gus Ternoey. In the spirit of the holidays, I invite everyone to join the Grain Farmers of Ontario in rooms 228 and 230 later this afternoon.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today representatives of the Ontario Public Transit Association. They're here for their advocacy day. I don't see them yet in the members' gallery, but I want to welcome: Karen Cameron, president and CEO of OPTA; Rick Leary, CEO, and Kyla Marrin, manager of government relations and policy, of the Toronto Transit Commission; Carla Stout, general manager of the Niagara Transit Commission; Renée Amilcar, general manager of OC Transpo; and Kelly Paleczny, general manager of the London Transit Commission. Welcome to Queen's Park.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** I would like to echo the sentiment from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and welcome Lorena Patterson and Jan Westcott here today from Spirits Canada. They will be participating in a fantastic reception with the grain farmers later this afternoon.

**Hon. Doug Downey:** I'd also like to bring welcome to Jan Westcott, a former page and from Spirits Canada; and Andrew Walasek of the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs. I enjoy both of their products, but not together.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Today, I would like to welcome my son Joey Cuzzetto here. He's here from Queen's University, as well.

**Hon. Michael A. Tibollo:** I just wanted to say a special hello to my good friend up in the gallery, Randy Aulbrook. Welcome to the House.

**Mr. John Vanthof:** I see we have a couple of seconds left. I'd like to give a shout-out to my grandson Joey. He is one year old today and he's celebrating with his other grandparents in Saudi Arabia.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** On that note, I'd like to wish a very, very happy birthday to my brother Sean, who is celebrating today. Happy birthday, Sean.

1040

**Mr. Ross Romano:** I would like to give a special shout-out to one of our pages from the great riding of Sault Ste. Marie. Grace Curran is with us, and I really want to say a special thank you to her.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** My question is to the Minister of Health. The Minister of Health has risen in this House countless times over the past few weeks saying that the government had “prepared” for the surge in respiratory illnesses. And yet, just this past weekend, CHEO in Ottawa has had to call in the Red Cross to help. That is not what a well-resourced and prepared health care system looks like, Speaker.

Does the minister think it's acceptable for a hospital to have to call in the Red Cross?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Eglinton–Lawrence and parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** We understand how difficult this fall has been. We've inherited a broken system, which has been put under pressure by the triple threat now of RSV, COVID and influenza. But we inherited this system and we intended to take steps to fix it, which is what we've been doing to ensure children get the care they need.

Our government is in constant contact with our pediatric hospitals. In fact, our government funded a second pediatric ICU at CHEO for the fall surge, which CHEO has been staffing until now. But now they need a little extra help, and they have asked a small team to come in temporarily from Red Cross to assist them with the second pediatric ICU, but that was certainly part of our planning to make sure we had the care we'd need for pediatric patients at CHEO and other pediatric hospitals.

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

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Well, Speaker, I'll help the minister out: Calling in the Red Cross to help in our hospitals should never have to happen—full stop.

Ontarians deserve a health care system that provides the care they need when they need it. CHEO has already had to cancel surgeries, open a second pediatric ICU and transfer teenage patients to adult hospitals. It's now clear that this government hasn't done enough.

Why didn't the minister do more to ensure that the province was prepared for the respiratory season?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Thank you to the member opposite for the question. Our government has been moving all kinds of things in order to make sure we're prepared for the fall surge. That is why we opened a second pediatric ICU at CHEO and why CHEO is now making sure they have more staff to assist.

As Tammy DeGiovanni, the chief nursing officer at CHEO, has said:

"It has been all hands on deck at CHEO this viral season as we have responded to unprecedented volumes" of "RSV, the flu and COVID.... We have redeployed staff and medical staff from surgical and medical care units, added extra beds and workers in our pediatric intensive care and emergency departments as well as in-patient units, and asked non-clinical staff to support clinical teams where possible. Everyone at CHEO has been" doing all they can "to take care of kids and their families."

Our government applauds the work of our health care workers in making sure that pediatric patients and all patients in our system are getting the care they need.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Waterloo will come to order. The member for Brampton North will come to order.

Final supplementary question.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Speaker, there is a massive disconnect between what the minister says and what's happening in our children's hospitals.

The FAO has shown that in the first half of the year, the government underspent in health care by nearly a billion dollars. To add insult to injury, the government plans to appeal the ruling on Bill 124, which has already driven countless health care workers out of our system. The government continues to underfund and degrade our publicly funded health care system.

Why is the minister letting the situation in our hospitals get so bad?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The President of the Treasury Board.

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** Let's be clear: For the last year, as our public accounts showed, we increased funding to health care by \$5.2 billion in base funding. That is the largest increase in the history of this province.

What does that mean? That means that since March of 2020 this province has added over 12,000 health care professionals in Ontario. This year alone, the Ontario college of nurses has registered over 12,800 nurses. This is because the investments that this government is making to shore up our health human resources are working.

We're going to continue to make those historic and unprecedented investments into health care to ensure that we have the support across this province.

LAND USE PLANNING

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: The Harris PC government sold off

public land in the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve over two decades ago at deeply discounted prices, on the condition that these lands remain farmland in perpetuity. By forgoing revenues and selling these lands at a deep discount, the people of Ontario bought and paid for a massive investment in Ontario's natural and agriculture systems. The value of this public investment is today worth billions of dollars.

Why is the minister betraying the public's trust by removing these farmland protections and giving away this immensely valuable public investment to powerful land speculators like the De Gasperis family?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** The government wants to thank everyone who provided comments on the Environmental Registry of Ontario for our posting related to the greenbelt. As members will know, that posting, at the end of the day, will add over 2,000 acres to the greenbelt while at the same time providing, under very strict criteria, the opportunity to build up to 50,000 homes.

Because his members wouldn't let me read an excerpt from Mayor Kevin Ashe from the city of Pickering regarding the DRAP, I'll do it today, Speaker, with your indulgence. Mayor Ashe says, "I would also like to support and thank you and your government for your efforts in proposing the removal of the Cherrywood Area Lands from the greenbelt plan and in proposing to repeal the Central Pickering Development Plan. In light of this planned residential and commercial growth, I am encouraged that your ministry will ultimately augment and strengthen the greenbelt by adding 9,400 acres to it."

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

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Again to the Minister: Immediately after public lands in the preserve were sold off at deep discounts, they were snapped up by speculators like Silvio De Gasperis, even though those lands were protected and could not be developed. It's as if they knew these protections might soon be removed. Sure enough, the city of Pickering, under Mayor Dave Ryan, removed the protections, in violation of the agreement between the city, the region and the province.

The Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act was passed in 2005 to reverse this betrayal of public trust. Why is the minister repealing the act and once again betraying the public trust?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Again, the member opposite quotes former Mayor Ryan. Mayor Ashe references Mayor Ryan in his letter. In fact, in the first paragraph, he acknowledges that I recently received a letter from Mayor Ryan requesting the repeal of the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Act, 2005, in the city of Pickering. As noted in this letter, the lands would be part of a regional and municipal growth plan for settlement area. This was in a plan prior to the greenbelt's creation, some 20 years ago. We've got letters from both Mayor Ryan and now Mayor Ashe asking the government to do exactly what the posting on the environmental registry did.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Final supplementary.

**Mr. Peter Tabuns:** Again to the minister: The sale of discounted public lands in the preserve was overseen by Tony Miele, who was president of the Ontario Realty Corporation. Mr. Miele and the ORC both had a reputation for questionable land deals. Mr. Miele currently serves as chair of the PC Ontario Fund, at a time when serious questions are being asked about why the beneficiaries of questionable planning decisions by this government tend to be PC Party donors.

The minister is about to remove protections from the preserve, giving billions of dollars' worth of public wealth to private interests. Why is the minister enabling this betrayal of the public trust?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'll remind the members of the House that you can't impute motive.

Government House leader to respond.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** The member knows that nothing could be further from the truth. We were elected on a very strong platform to ensure that the people of the province of Ontario were well serviced by their government. What that means right now is that the people of the province of Ontario know that we are in a housing crisis. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has brought forward a very thoughtful program that would allow us to work in consultation and in co-operation with the city of Pickering to ensure that we can bring homes to the people of this province.

I look around me at my caucus here and I wonder how many of them are first-generation Canadians whose parents came here with one dream, and that dream was to have a better life for their family and for their kids. Part of that dream, I know from my parents, was to have their first home.

1050

The opposition would take that dream away from the over 500,000 people who are expected to come here each and every year. Mr. Speaker, we won't do that. We have a responsibility to the people of the province of Ontario to ensure that they can meet their dreams like countless generations have. They want to take that away from people; we'll make sure that they get it.

#### GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Speaker, through you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: Last week, the minister failed to explain why he was allowing his ministry to be lobbied by his former chief of staff Luca Bucci, who left the ministry in April, less than eight months ago. The government House leader wouldn't even let the minister answer.

Maybe the minister will answer this: Before Mr. Bucci became CEO of the Ontario Home Builders' Association, or since, did the minister or any other government official share information with Mr. Bucci, information not available to the general public, that could be used by a member of the Ontario Home Builders' Association to further their private interests?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Government House leader.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I know that the members opposite will do anything—they're like a leak, right? You know when you have a leak in your house and you want to find out where the leak is before it does too much damage, right? Of course, the people of Ontario know what happens if you don't find that leak. By consequence, we didn't find it in 1990 to 1995 and the NDP almost bankrupted the province.

But more importantly, Mr. Speaker, we have a situation in the province of Ontario where we are in a housing crisis. The NDP are going to do and say everything they possibly can to stop hundreds of thousands and millions of Ontarians from having the same dream that millions have. Put your hand up in this caucus or over there if you're a first-generation or if your parents came here. Look at the hands that are going up.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'll ask the government House leader to make his comments through the Chair.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** And the number one dream—  
*Interjections.*

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** They hate it. They hate it because the number one dream of millions and millions of people who built this province, who built this country, was to have a better life for their family.

When my parents came here impoverished from Italy, they came here to have a better life for their kids. And the number one dream is the value of a home. They got it and look where they—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Stop the clock. Order.

Start the clock. The supplementary question.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** So the government House leader doesn't want to answer the question.

On September 15, just two months before the minister announced plans to remove certain properties from the greenbelt, one of these properties sold to a company controlled by developer and PC donor Michael Rice. The real estate listing advertised the property as a "prime land banking opportunity," as if expecting the value of this greenbelt land to rise.

The seller was the developer Schickedanz Bros., who sold the property for nearly nine times what they paid for it in 2000. Speaker, Bob Schickedanz was president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association on September 15, at the same time Luca Bucci was CEO of the Home Builders' Association.

Did the minister or any other government official share information with Mr. Bucci that could be used by the buyer or seller of the Schickedanz property to further their private interests, yes or no?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Obviously, the minister has already said no. The minister has said that he will work with the Integrity Commissioner.

But more importantly, what you're seeing day in and day out, colleagues, is the NDP who refuse to acknowledge that in the province of Ontario there is a housing

crisis. That housing crisis was created by policies that they helped support.

We know that in the province of Ontario we want to continue to welcome people from all over the world to help us build a better and more prosperous Ontario, just like my parents did. When my parents came in the late 1950s and early 1960s, all of them, the brothers and their sisters—six of them lived in one house. Some lived upstairs; some lived in the basement. And one by one they managed to have the dream of a brand new home right here in the province of Ontario. That was the dream when they came. They wanted their kids to have a better future than they had. That's why millions of people came here, struggled, and helped build the province of Ontario.

They want to take that dream away from people. This Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing said no. That is a dream that countless generations had—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Thank you. Next question.

#### SKILLED TRADES

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Last Friday, I had the pleasure of meeting with the ironworkers of Local 765, along with the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. Local 765 is located in the great community of Metcalfe, in my riding of Carleton. I saw the amazing work Ontario's skilled tradespeople do to keep our province's economic engine running.

Unfortunately, Ontario is facing a labour shortage. In Ottawa alone, there are more than 42,000 vacant positions. The skilled trades are no exception, and opportunities abound for people looking for a job in this sector.

My question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development: What is our government doing to bring more people into the skilled trades? Thank you.

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** I want to thank the member for Carleton for that question and for an amazing day that we had in her riding on Friday.

We need all hands on deck to get more people in the skilled trades and to build those 1.5 million homes by 2031, to welcome all of those new Canadians that are going to be coming to Ontario. That's why we are investing a record \$1.5 billion over the next four years to teach anyone who is eager to work in the trades the skills they need for these life-changing careers.

The Ironworkers Local 765 in Ottawa and right across Ontario are constructing, installing and erecting the iron that our major infrastructure projects depend on. Simply put, we depend on them to keep Ontario standing tall. They are everyday heroes and we need more people like them to continue building Ontario.

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

**Ms. Goldie Ghamari:** Thank you to the minister for that answer. I am pleased to hear that our government is making the necessary investments to help grow Ontario's economy through its skilled trades strategy. With one in

three tradespeople over the age of 55, it's critical that our government fill the oncoming vacancies from retirement by training the next generation of skilled trades workers.

My question is once again to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development: What is our government doing to market the skilled trades to young people?

**Hon. Monte McNaughton:** Again, thank you to the member for Carleton. To fix Ontario's skilled trades shortage, we need to show more students that these are rewarding, well-paying and in-demand careers. That's why, for the first time in Ontario's history, we hosted five skilled trades career fairs this fall, with more than 20,000 students and parents attending. Working with our union partners, employers and colleges, students got hands-on experience with a variety of trades and the chance to hear directly from tradespeople about the work that they do.

To tackle the shortage in the skilled trades, we must promote these amazing careers to our young people. They are the next generation and we need them to build a stronger Ontario for all of us.

#### EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** Good morning, Speaker. *Remarks in Oji-Cree.*

My question is to the Premier. Highway 105 was washed out, separating Red Lake and Ear Falls from the rest of Ontario, and Sioux Lookout experienced flooding during the spring. Kiiwetinoong experienced unprecedented flooding. Sioux Lookout experienced flooding that damaged over 30 homes and businesses, including two hotels.

Last week, the Auditor General said Ontario is not doing enough to help municipalities with this planning. Mr. Speaker, they need assistance. What is Ontario doing to help communities in the north to mitigate future flooding?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Government House leader.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Well, it's an important question, given how important the north is to the province of Ontario. We've said that right from the beginning.

There is a tremendous amount of resources that have been put not only into northern communities but across the province of Ontario to ensure that we are prepared to meet the challenges of natural disasters, both in southern and northern Ontario, in urban and rural communities. That means working very closely with our municipalities, who have expertise on the ground.

The important thing, when we talk about the north, is that we have to create those partnerships, because it is so important. That's why we are bringing, of course, more roads and transportation networks to northern Ontario. I know the Minister of Mines has been working very hard with First Nations partners and with our mining partners to ensure that we can unleash the power of the north. I know the Minister of Energy last week just talked about how we finally were able to get hydroelectricity to some

parts of northern Ontario—I know the honourable gentleman was there as well—finally taking them off diesel generators.

**1100**

Look, the north is an important part of the economic prosperity to the province of Ontario, as he talked about, and that's why we're working so closely with our partners to mitigate that.

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

**Mr. Sol Mamakwa:** There are floods and fires that keep happening in the north, and we need to be able to have good plans for First Nations and northern municipalities to protect towns and also the First Nations. Every year, communities in Kiiwetinoong evacuate because of forest fires that threaten everything. The Auditor General found that it took up to 11 hours to coordinate a response. That is unacceptable.

Ontario can do more to prepare and manage emergency responses to these annual forest fires. What is Ontario doing to improve forest fire responsiveness and planning for First Nations and communities in the north?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** It's an important question, again, from the member opposite. I know the Minister of Natural Resources, of course, has been working with his cabinet colleagues the Minister of Northern Development as well as the Minister of Mines and the member for Sault Ste. Marie to ensure our northern parts of the province are well serviced. In particular, we've seen a number of forest fire seasons that were very, very challenging.

Now, of course, the member knows that we have invested to ensure that our fleets of water bombers and fire equipment are available for the north, but we're also doing it in partnership not only with other municipalities but with our partners both in Quebec and Manitoba. We all face very similar challenges. That's why we have been working so closely with partners across the board.

But Ontario has made those investments. There are certainly more investments to make as we continue to see growth in northern Ontario—look, simple growth that had not existed with any other government because everybody else seemed to ignore northern Ontario. We understand how important it is to the economic vitality of the province of Ontario, and we'll continue to make those important investments.

#### ENTREPRENEURIAT FRANCOPHONE

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Ma question s'adresse à la ministre des Affaires francophones. Dans le cadre de la mise en oeuvre de sa Stratégie de développement économique francophone, notre gouvernement a récemment annoncé qu'il financera quatre projets représentant une somme combinée de 500 000 \$ pour soutenir l'entrepreneuriat francophone.

La francophonie ontarienne contribue à notre richesse culturelle et à notre croissance économique, et nous savons

que l'avenir de la langue française est intimement lié à la prospérité des entreprises francophones.

Monsieur le Président, la ministre peut-elle nous en dire plus sur la façon dont le gouvernement élargit le soutien aux entreprises francophones?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Je remercie ma collègue pour son excellente question. La francophonie ontarienne est un atout économique pour la province. C'est pourquoi nous élargissons la gamme de services aux jeunes entreprises francophones dans le cadre de notre investissement de 1,5 million de dollars sur trois ans pour soutenir la croissance des entrepreneurs et des entreprises francophones ici en Ontario.

Le ministère des Affaires francophones finance des initiatives qui offriront aux entrepreneurs francophones du soutien et des conseils pour les aider à naviguer dans les différentes phases du développement d'entreprise. La Stratégie de développement économique francophone de notre gouvernement vise à accroître l'empreinte économique francophone, à renforcer la main-d'oeuvre francophone, à stimuler la création d'emplois et aussi à faciliter le développement de nouveaux marchés pour les entreprises francophones et bilingues de l'Ontario.

Je suis très fière du travail que nous faisons pour appuyer les communautés francophones de l'Ontario à travers notre travail sur le développement économique francophone.

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

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Merci à la ministre pour cette réponse. Je suis tellement heureuse d'entendre parler d'initiatives qui encouragent les nouvelles entreprises pendant leur période de démarrage. La communauté d'entrepreneurs francophones de l'Ontario continue de croître chaque jour. C'est pourquoi notre gouvernement doit s'assurer de soutenir l'entrepreneuriat francophone partout dans la province dans le cadre de notre plan pour bâtir l'Ontario.

La ministre peut-elle nous en dire plus sur les projets retenus cette année et sur le soutien que notre gouvernement leur apporte dans le cadre de cet investissement?

**L'hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Les entrepreneurs francophones de l'Ontario représentent près de 30 000 entreprises et cela représente 50 % des entreprises francophones hors Québec. Les projets retenus proposent des approches innovantes pour encadrer les entreprises en phase d'incubation, et aussi serviront à accompagner les entrepreneurs francophones, favorisant ainsi le démarrage de leurs entreprises.

Cet investissement renforcera un écosystème en plein développement et mettra en valeur le savoir-faire de la francophonie économique ici en Ontario. Les services d'appui aux jeunes entreprises offerts par des organismes tels que le Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario, La Cité collégiale et aussi l'Association francophone à l'éducation des services à l'enfance de l'Ontario—tous ces trois organismes, qui contribuent à assurer la prospérité de nos communautés francophones en Ontario.

## HEALTH CARE WORKERS

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** My question is to the Premier. Over the past half decade under your watch, my community and its hospitals in Niagara have struggled to keep pace with our health care needs. Policies like Bill 124 have contributed to a nursing and staff crisis month over month. Over the summer, Niagara Health had over 608 staff vacancies. I know that number has grown now. Even worse, those vacancies have more than doubled since November 2019, the month that your health care morale-kill-ing policy, Bill 124, received royal assent.

The courts overturned Bill 124, Premier.

Premier, will you do the right thing and recognize your policies have worsened our health care staffing crisis?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Minister of Colleges and Universities.

**Hon. Jill Dunlop:** Thank you to the member for the question. In fact, we've increased the number of medical seats at Brock University. I hope you've had the opportunity to tour the university and see the amazing things that are happening at Brock University.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, this fall we saw a record number of applications at Ontario's colleges and universities in the province: 25,000 students were applying for nursing programs at Ontario's colleges and universities—world-class post-secondary education. We are seeing record numbers of students looking to join the profession, and we've already seen that the Council of Ontario Universities says that more than 13,000 students applied to university nursing programs this past year.

We've also seen changes to the Ministry of Health through the Ontario college of nurses, where we've seen a record number of 14,000 registered nurses this season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's lots more to come.

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

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** You can cherry-pick your record on health care; however, any way you slice it, it is still getting worse.

I used to work in health care, and, let me tell you, you are not tricking the nurses on the front line. You are not tricking the seniors and parents that have to wait endlessly—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I'm going to ask the member to make her comments through the Chair. Continue with your question.

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

We see the receipts. We see the results, and the results are the results.

Premier, why do you still plan to appeal Bill 124 when it is clear your health care policies over the last half decade have led to a worsening of the staffing crisis in Niagara and straight across Ontario?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Again, I'll ask members to make their comments through the Chair.

The member for Niagara West to reply.

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** Thanks to the member opposite for the question. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to

some of the information that is not accurate in the member opposite's statement.

We know the importance of ensuring that investments continue, the types of investments that we've seen, including in three new hospitals in the Niagara region: the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital, the new Niagara south hospital and the Hotel Dieu Shaver hospital. We've seen two new palliative care expansions, 20 new palliative care beds being brought into our area. We've seen a new nursing program launch at Niagara College, as well as an expanded nursing program doubling the amount of nursing graduates from Brock University.

These are the types of investments that, under the leadership of Premier Ford and this team, we are making in Niagara to ensure that each and every patient in our region has access to the world-class care that they deserve. The opposition had years to make that happen with the Liberals and they didn't—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order.

Please start the clock. The next question.

1110

## LAND USE PLANNING

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** My question is for the Premier. Thousands of people in communities across Ontario attended rallies this weekend calling on the Premier to keep his promise not to touch the greenbelt. My favourite chant was, "No to housing in the greenbelt, yes to housing in my backyard."

The government's own Housing Affordability Task Force said there is no need to develop the greenbelt. There is plenty of land already approved for development to build the homes that people need. The Premier himself has said, "I've heard it loud and clear" that "people don't want me touching the greenbelt. We won't touch the greenbelt."

Speaker, the people are speaking out loud and clear right now. So the question is, will the Premier listen to the people who don't want him to touch the greenbelt, or will he listen to land speculators who want to pave over the people's greenbelt?

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Kitchener-Conestoga will come to order.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to reply.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** So, here's what we know, Speaker: Our per capita housing supply lags behind our G7 and our Canadian peers, who we compete with for jobs and investment. Today, our province is nearly 1.3 million homes, rented or owned, short of that G7 average. That's why we're in the middle of a housing crisis.

The University of Ottawa-based smart prosperity centre found that Ontario's pre-existing shortage is already 471,000 homes in 2021. We need over an additional million homes just to get to that average of other G7 countries and our Canadian peers. And then, as has been noted this morning, we already know that we're going to



have an influx of new immigration who we want to welcome to our province—probably 60% of that half a million new Canadians are going to come here. That's why we're putting forward policies, procedures, bills, regulations to get shovels in the ground.

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

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** There is one thing I will agree with the minister on: The housing crisis has gotten worse under this government's watch. But let's be honest with people. Breaking the Premier's greenbelt promise will not solve the housing affordability crisis. This government's own housing task force says that. Housing experts and activists say that. We know that developing the greenbelt will help a handful of wealthy land speculators turn millions into billions, and the rest of us are going to pay the price: longer, more expensive commutes; flood threats to our lives, livelihoods and property; higher property taxes; and threats to our food security and farming economy.

If we want to solve the housing crisis, let's end exclusionary zoning and build affordable homes where people want to live, in the communities they want to live in and close to where they work. The question is, will the Premier put people before speculators and repeal Bill 23?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** It's pretty rich coming from the member for Guelph. Guelph city council, if you can believe this, Speaker, voted against student housing on land that's owned by the University of Guelph—unbelievable. So again, Speaker, millennials in Ontario have to save for over 20 years to get a down payment on a home. The lack of affordability in the greater Golden Horseshoe is even steeper.

I am not going to stand here like the member for Guelph, the leader of the Green Party, and defend the status quo. He opposes building homes, he opposes getting things done and he opposes the realization of the dream of home ownership for a generation of Ontarians.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

**Mr. Robert Bailey:** This question is to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. There is a growing interest in geological carbon capture and storage to safely store carbon dioxide in deep bedrock formations. Storing carbon dioxide deep underground is one way of reducing the impact of greenhouse gases from high-emitting sources like heavy industrial activity.

In response to evolving energy needs and priorities, Ontario's businesses have been interested in pursuing new underground storage opportunities. According to a discussion paper posted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, there is a potential for enabling carbon storage in Ontario. Several areas throughout our province might have the right mix of geological conditions for storage capabilities.

Speaker, can the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry please elaborate further on carbon storage technology and its environmental and economical benefits?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** To reply, the Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

**Hon. Parm Gill:** I want to thank my colleague the member for Sarnia–Lambton for that important question and for his hard work on behalf of his constituents.

Carbon storage is a technology that involves injecting carbon dioxide into deep underground rock formations for permanent storage. You take the carbon dioxide emitted from power plants, steel mills or any other industrial process that you can think of and capture it. Instead of having the carbon dioxide released into the air, this process ensures that it never gets a chance to be released in the air.

The strategy is allowing us to develop a self-sustaining sector in Ontario, create local jobs and attract investments, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I think all of us in this House, whether you're on this side or that side, agree that we need to do our part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect the environment.

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

**Mr. Robert Bailey:** Thank you to the minister for that answer. In fact, Sarnia–Lambton has got the right geological formations for that kind of carbon capture and storage, so I'm very interested in it.

Exploring the implementation of carbon storage is certainly a significant step in helping to reduce Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions and in producing low-carbon hydrogen. Along with environmental benefits that can be achieved, this technology also provides opportunities to increase Ontario's competitiveness and supports job creation. Ontarians are counting on our government to implement measures that will help support economic growth and productivity, while ensuring environmental protection.

Speaker, can the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry please elaborate on what action this government is taking to enable underground geological storage of carbon as we move forward?

**Hon. Parm Gill:** I want to thank my colleague for that important question once again. Just last Wednesday, as part of the Less Red Tape, Stronger Ontario Act, 2022, we proposed an amendment to the Oil, Gas and Salt Resources Act to remove the restrictions related to carbon storage in our province. This initial step signals to the industry that our government is serious in our intention to support geologic carbon storage and that we are taking a phased and thoughtful approach to regulate the activity. We know that carbon storage is new to Ontario and we want to ensure the activity is undertaken responsibly, with measures in place that make sure it is done in a way that is safe and effective.

This ambitious plan that we have announced as part of the Less Red Tape, Stronger Ontario Act will help our efforts to reduce Ontario's emissions and cut red tape for businesses and industry, while safeguarding the people of Ontario and our environment.

#### PUBLIC TRANSIT

**MPP Jill Andrew:** My question is to the Premier. Last week, the Auditor General reported that the P3 contracts used to build Ottawa's LRT resulted in more problems and

less accountability. The same companies contracted in Ottawa through these shady P3s are responsible for the expensive Eglinton Crosstown P3 mess that has frustrated my community in St. Paul's for over a decade. My community needs accountability from this government more than ever. They need assurance that the Ottawa LRT fiasco won't repeat itself on Eglinton.

My question is to the Premier: Why are the Premier, the minister and Metrolinx choosing to conceal, instead of answer to the public—the people paying for the actual project—how long this latest Eglinton LRT delay really is going to be?

1120

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Transportation.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** I thank the member opposite for the question. Speaker, the delays that are plaguing the Eglinton Crosstown LRT are frustrating for everyone, for people living along the line and for businesses that are there. As the member opposite knows, we inherited this project from the previous Liberal government, which mismanaged the project from the start. Right now, Speaker, our focus is on making sure that the Eglinton Crosstown LRT is safely operational as soon as possible.

Let's be clear, we are continuing to make progress on our priority projects for the GTA: the new Ontario Line and the three extensions. But to get those projects built in a different way, we passed the Building Transit Faster Act, an act that's designed to address a lot of the issues that the member opposite is raising. Mr. Speaker, that member and the party opposite voted against the Building Transit Faster Act. They voted against getting shovels in the ground and getting transit built faster. I think the question that should be asked in this House is why they voted against such an important piece of legislation to get transit built faster.

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

**MPP Jill Andrew:** The Ontario Line is 75% over budget. That's why we said no.

Accountability isn't all we need. For 10 years, small businesses in midtown and Little Jamaica have been devastated by the LRT's construction, with more businesses shutting down for good than I can count. Small businesses are a community. The latest LRT delay, pushing the open date to late 2023 at the earliest, will be the last straw.

While many of our small businesses didn't get help during the pandemic, this Premier gave nearly \$1 billion—\$1 billion—to corporations and businesses that didn't need it or didn't qualify. Some of them weren't even in Ontario, Speaker.

My question is back to the Premier. Will you be providing substantial financial support for our small businesses so that they can weather this storm that this government has created?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Our government does not believe that these kinds of delays are acceptable. That's exactly why we passed the Building Transit Faster Act. I

can't understand why the members opposite voted against such an important piece of legislation that will make sure that future transit is built more quickly and is built better than the way the Liberals had planned.

Mr. Speaker, let's be clear: We have been there for businesses along the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. We have provided supports for those businesses that have been impacted by construction. Metrolinx has been collaborating not only with the city of Toronto but also with local BIAs to establish a joint committee that's responsible for determining where these funds should go.

Mr. Speaker, we know that this has been a difficult go for the people along the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. That's why we're so determined to do it differently.

## HOMELESSNESS

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** Speaker, homelessness is an extremely important and complex issue that impacts Ontarians. Last week, I was speaking with Jasmin from LAMP Community Health Centre in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. We discussed the challenges that are faced by individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and how they become all the more heightened during the winter months.

While it is essential that assistance and programs are available to meet urgent needs, there must also be new solutions and coordination of services to support Ontario's most vulnerable people. Across this province, there are many individuals and families whose physical, mental and social well-being are at risk because they need access to resources and local supports.

Speaker, can the Associate Minister of Housing please explain what our government is doing to provide vulnerable Ontarians with the support they need?

**Hon. Michael Parsa:** I want to thank my honourable colleague for this very important question and for all the great work she does in her community.

Speaker, I want to point out that Ontario, under this government, is the primary funder of all homelessness programs, with 86% of the funding coming directly from the province. Earlier this year, we developed a new Homelessness Prevention Program to simplify and streamline operations to allow service managers to help more people find a home and spend less time on paperwork. We also increased this program by \$25 million this year, bringing the total close to half a billion dollars annually.

Speaker, I recently visited Scott Mission here in Toronto and the Ottawa Mission before heading north to visit Urban Abbey and Grace Place in Thunder Bay to see first-hand the great work that's being done to support those who are facing housing challenges.

Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again: We will continue to be there and we will work with all partners to make sure we don't leave any Ontarian behind.

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

**Ms. Christine Hogarth:** I just want to thank the minister for that answer. It is extremely important. During

the winter months, the weather in many regions, as we all know, can drop to extremely cold temperatures and this creates conditions that can adversely impact the health and well-being of those in need of shelter. Individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness have a much higher risk of developing hypothermia or frostbite than the general population during cold winter seasons.

Our government must provide assistance to individuals whose health and safety might be at risk because of the cold. Can the Associate Minister of Housing provide details about support systems and programs available to those needing shelter?

**Hon. Michael Parsa:** Thanks again to my colleague for the follow-up question. Speaker, through you to my colleague, rest assured that we'll continue to be there for anyone in Ontario who needs support, and we'll continue to work with our municipal partners and our federal partners as well to do more so that we can continue to address homelessness in Ontario.

Speaker, I would like to point out that a few municipalities across our province have opened up warming centres for those who are looking for a place to stay, and we need to continue to work together to be there for all those in need of support. I encourage Ontarians who need more information, or assistance, to dial 311.

Speaker, this government will simply not leave anyone behind. We'll continue to work with our partners, like the Salvation Army, amongst others, to ensure that every Ontarian has a warm and safe place this winter season.

#### MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

**Ms. Jessica Bell:** My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Last Thursday, we heard from 18 witnesses about Bill 39. Fourteen of those 18 witnesses spoke against the bill. They represent the overwhelming public outcry against this government's unprecedented attack on local democracy. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario made this very point, saying, "Bill 39 will disenfranchise elected councillors and potentially destabilize and undermine the authority of municipal government."

AMO is not alone in its understanding of this matter. It has been expressed clearly and repeatedly by countless media outlets, leading scholars, political commentators, and others who care about democracy and good government. Minister, will you listen to Ontarians and withdraw Bill 39?

**Hon. Steve Clark:** The member opposite did a member's statement acting like Bill 39 was passed in the Legislature. The bill is in committee. In fact, I think the opposition only mustered up three amendments to the whole bill. So never underestimate the NDP to do the least amount of work possible.

Again, Speaker, I support Mayor Tory. Mayor Tory's request for this amendment to the strong-mayors legislation is something our government supports, because we want to ensure that Mayor Tory, who received a strong democratic city-wide mandate in the October 24

election—he wants to get shovels in the ground, and he wants to support our goal to build 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years, unlike the NDP, Speaker, who won't even utter the words "home ownership" in the Legislature. Shame on you.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Supplementary? The member for Toronto Centre.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** My question is to the Premier. Former mayors of Toronto have called Bill 39 an "attack on one of the essential tenets of our local democracy and" with it "a fundamental democratic mechanism: majority rule."

The mayors also note that with the integrity and the well-being of Ontarians on the line, people are organizing for a historic showdown. The title of this fight is "Citizens versus the provincial government."

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Order. Stop the clock. The member may take her seat.

There's a lot of conversation taking place at this end of the chamber and it's making it difficult to hear the member who actually has the floor.

1130

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The member for Carleton will come to order. The member for Scarborough–Guildwood will come to order—and Brampton North, I think for the fourth time today.

Start the clock.

The member for Toronto Centre has the floor.

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Thank you, Speaker. I'm just going to repeat the question.

This government should remember that the last time they tried to trample on the rights of Ontarians, the people were united. They fought back, and the government was embarrassingly forced to repeal their unconstitutional bill at that time, in less than a week.

Speaker, through you to the Premier: Will the government withdraw Bill 39 before they're forced to repeal it?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** I'm going to quote MPP Wong-Tam when they had the title of city councillor, because I think it really sends a message on how the NDP operate: "Good luck trying to build your tower or your condo if we don't give you the road occupancy permit. Good luck if we don't give you that permission to remove that single tiny little tree. It is simply not going to happen."

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** Wow, talk about BANANAs.

**Hon. Steve Clark:** Yes, talk about BANANAs.

We're going to support Mayor Tory, who received a strong, democratic, city-wide mandate. I've said in this House that every other councillor combined—the mayor still had 36,000 more votes. He wants to make the strong-mayor powers work. We want to work with him. A third of the growth in the next decade is going to come in our two biggest cities, Toronto and Ottawa. We have to give

those mayors the tools to get shovels in the ground faster. That's exactly what Bill 39 does.

### MINING INDUSTRY

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Our government recently announced an environmental assessment proposal that will help secure a critical minerals project in northwestern Ontario. This critical minerals project will bring job opportunities and secure Ontario's future as a leader in the generation of clean, sustainable electric vehicles.

While we hear from the opposition that our government does little to protect the environment, it is evident that our government's actions demonstrate environmentally responsible leadership.

Can the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks please explain how this environmental assessment approval will support northwestern Ontario?

**Hon. David Piccini:** I'd like to thank the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan for that excellent question. He's right: Too often we hear this false choice. Environmental protection and economic development go hand in hand, and that's a belief of this government. In fact, that worrying false dichotomy presents a fundamental lack of belief in Ontarians and in the potential of the men and women in the north.

Speaker, there is no net-zero without mining. In the north, the corridor to prosperity means the critical minerals we need to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels.

Just this past week, I approved, with my powers under the Environmental Assessment Act, Generation PGM's Marathon mine project. This approval is a guarantee that this vital project will go forward for the people of northern Ontario.

Ontario is leading Canada, showing that by working with businesses, not taxing them, we can realize the potential of the north, work hand in hand with Indigenous partners, and ensure that Ontario is at the forefront of decarbonization.

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

**Mr. Kevin Holland:** Speaker, it's great to learn that our government is taking concrete steps to cement Ontario's place as a world leader in critical mineral exploration, production and innovation. It is evident that these efforts are bringing good jobs and prosperity to the people and communities of northern Ontario in an environmentally responsible way.

There is tremendous potential in the north, and many positive outcomes can be achieved as our government continues to promote Ontario's mining sector.

My question is to the Minister of Mines. Can he please elaborate further on the importance of this mining project in northwestern Ontario and how it will support our government's Critical Minerals Strategy?

**Hon. George Pirie:** Thank you to the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan for your question and for the great work you're doing in your riding.

Mr. Speaker, Generation Mining's Marathon palladium project supports our Critical Minerals Strategy by creating

a source of palladium, a mineral vital in the production of clean technologies, right here in Ontario. This market is important because Russia has cornered the market and is a primary global supplier of this mineral. Our strategy is combatting this and ensuring our allies have access to these resources by creating the right conditions for companies to do what they do best: build mines and create jobs.

Just listen to what Jamie Levy, CEO of Generation Mining, had to say about our government's support for their project: "We appreciate the support of the province throughout this process. This important critical mineral project will bring economic prosperity to the town of Marathon, Biigtigong Nishnaabeg, and the regional Indigenous communities by creating 900 construction jobs and 375 mining jobs."

Mr. Speaker, our Critical Minerals Strategy is working.

### GOVERNMENT CONTRACT

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** Last year, the Premier promised workers at the Alstom plant in Thunder Bay, "We will make sure anything bought in Ontario should be produced in Ontario." But this government secretly lowered the Canadian content rules for the Ontario Line from 25% to 10%. The Ontario Line contract went to a Japanese consortium, and \$2.3-billion worth of subway car manufacturing jobs are leaving the province.

The United States requires 75% American content for publicly funded transit vehicles, and this government won't even commit to 25%. Why did the Premier break his promise to Thunder Bay workers and send their jobs overseas?

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Minister of Transportation.

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Under the leadership of this Premier, we are delivering the largest transit expansion in Canadian history, all while investing in high-quality, high-paying, homegrown jobs. In the last three years alone, Mr. Speaker, our government has invested almost \$500 million to support Thunder Bay workers at the Alstom plant. We currently have nine open contracts with Alstom for projects across the province. We've recently ordered 60 new streetcars and the refurbishment of 94 GO train coaches to maintain 300 good manufacturing jobs at the Alstom facility.

As part of our largest transit expansion plan in Canadian history, the city of Toronto has been provided with the opportunity to redirect more than \$5 billion in its state-of-good-repair funding to the existing TTC network, which will then include the purchase of new streetcars and new subways. Mr. Speaker, this means real opportunity for the province of Ontario, and the member opposite's party voted against that deal.

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

**MPP Lise Vaugeois:** From a facility with 700 to 1,300 workers, it currently has 150. The plant is at risk of shutting down permanently by 2024 if contracts are not in place by the end of the year. There's a major contract for new TTC subway cars in the works, but the provincial and

federal governments have yet to come up with their share of the financing, keeping the project in limbo.

Will the Premier commit to announcing their financial support for the new TTC cars before the new year, and further, will the Premier commit to maintaining at least 25% Canadian content in all future light rail projects, ensuring that our world-class manufacturing facility in Thunder Bay not only survives, but thrives?

**Hon. Caroline Mulroney:** Under the leadership of Premier Ford, no government has ordered more Canadian-made vehicles than ours. The NDP can't have it both ways. They can't ask us to order more cars and then vote against the deal that's going to provide those cars and those jobs for the workers in Thunder Bay.

Part of the deal with the federal government and the city of Toronto and York region involve the redirecting of \$5 billion of funding to the state of good repair. The NDP and the Liberals voted against that deal. That is the way we're going to continue to send more orders to the Alstom plant in Thunder Bay to make sure that those high-quality, good-paying jobs are there for years and years to come. But, Mr. Speaker, we're putting forward the plans and the members opposite keep voting against them.

#### SMALL BUSINESS

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** I've had the opportunity to visit and meet with businesses in my riding of Ajax. I consistently hear the same message, that under the previous Liberal government, it was challenging to start and grow a business in Ontario. Hard-working innovators and small businesses struggled to navigate unnecessary, redundant and outdated regulations. Businesses in my community and across all of Ontario suffered from legislative barriers and the largest red tape burden in the country.

Ontarians expect their government to support them and to implement measures to increase our province's competitiveness, productivity and economic potential. Speaker, can the Minister of Red Tape Reduction please share how our government supports small businesses across Ontario?

**Hon. Parm Gill:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague the member from Ajax for that important question. She has been doing a great job, working with her businesses and also bringing some of the concerns to my attention.

The member is absolutely right. Our government inherited a regulatory system from the previous Liberal-NDP coalition government that was hurting our small businesses and drove hundreds of thousands of jobs out of the province.

Thankfully, our government is taking action. It has been a privilege to work with small businesses across our province, of course, resulting in the introduction of the Less Red Tape, Stronger Ontario Act. The bill will build on our government's strong record of cutting red tape over the last four and a half years. Since 2018, the red tape reduction measures we have introduced have saved businesses over half a billion dollars annually in compliance costs. We know our work is not done yet.

I will speak to it more in the supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** There's time for a supplementary question.

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to hear that small businesses in my community recognize and appreciate our government's continued efforts in supporting them. Removing duplication and other ineffectiveness are positive actions to enable people to thrive and businesses to prosper.

The historic progress achieved by our government to modernize processes and reduce red tape is helping businesses save time and money. Business owners, and all Ontarians, expect their government to focus on measures that make government services easier to access and interact with.

Speaker, can the Minister of Red Tape Reduction please explain the positive outcomes that have been achieved for the people of Ontario by cutting unnecessary red tape?

**Hon. Parm Gill:** I want to thank my honourable colleague for that question again. Common-sense changes like modernizing government and other initiatives in the bill will help improve affordability for all Ontarians. These 28 measures in the red tape bill will result, of course, in lower costs for consumers, without compromising public safety or the environment.

But don't just take my word for it, Mr. Speaker. This is what the Ontario Chamber of Commerce had to say:

"We welcome the government's continued commitment to creating a more competitive business environment through its red tape reduction bills.

"These measures can help support economic recovery by accelerating business growth, advancing innovative solutions, and attracting investment."

Mr. Speaker, we know we have more work to do. We will continue to work hard each and every day and get it done.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** That concludes our question period for this morning.

#### DEFERRED VOTES

##### PROTECTING AGRICULTURAL LAND ACT, 2022

##### LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROTECTION DES TERRES AGRICOLES

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

Bill 27, An Act to amend the Planning Act to protect agricultural land / Projet de loi 27, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire afin de protéger les terres agricoles.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

*The division bells rang from 1144 to 1149.*

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

On December 1, 2022, Mr. Vanthof moved second reading of Bill 27, An Act to amend the Planning Act to protect agricultural land. All those in favour of the motion will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

#### Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy
Bell, Jessica	Hsu, Ted	Schreiner, Mike
Blais, Stephen	Hunter, Mitzie	Shamji, Adil
Bourgouin, Guy	Karpoche, Bhutla	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Mamakwa, Sol	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Mantha, Michael	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gates, Wayne	Rakocevic, Tom	

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** All those opposed to the motion will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

#### Nays

Anand, Deepak	Hogarth, Christine	Rasheed, Kaleed
Babikian, Aris	Holland, Kevin	Riddell, Brian
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Trevor	Romano, Ross
Barnes, Patrice	Jordan, John	Sabawy, Sheref
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Ke, Vincent	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bouma, Will	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bresee, Ric	Khanjin, Andrea	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Byers, Rick	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Saunderson, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Leardi, Anthony	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Stan	Lecce, Stephen	Skelly, Donna
Clark, Steve	Martin, Robin	Smith, Dave
Coe, Lorne	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, David
Crawford, Stephen	McGregor, Graham	Smith, Laura
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McNaughton, Monte	Surma, Kinga
Downey, Doug	Mulroney, Caroline	Tangri, Nina
Dunlop, Jill	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Flack, Rob	Pang, Billy	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fullerton, Merrilee	Parsa, Michael	Tibollo, Michael A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Piccini, David	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ghamari, Goldie	Pierre, Natalie	Wai, Daisy
Gill, Parm	Pirie, George	Williams, Charmaine A.
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan	
Harris, Mike	Rae, Matthew	

**The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day):** The ayes are 29; the nays are 67.

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

*Second reading negatived.*

### LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AMENDMENT ACT, 2022

### LOI DE 2022 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE

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

Bill 51, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act / Projet de loi 51, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

*The division bells rang from 1153 to 1154.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** On December 1, 2022, Mr. Harris moved second reading of Bill 51, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act. All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

#### Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Hogarth, Christine	Rasheed, Kaleed
Babikian, Aris	Holland, Kevin	Riddell, Brian
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Trevor	Romano, Ross
Barnes, Patrice	Jordan, John	Sabawy, Sheref
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Ke, Vincent	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bouma, Will	Kerzner, Michael S.	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bresee, Ric	Khanjin, Andrea	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Byers, Rick	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Saunderson, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Leardi, Anthony	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Stan	Lecce, Stephen	Skelly, Donna
Clark, Steve	Martin, Robin	Smith, Dave
Coe, Lorne	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, David
Crawford, Stephen	McGregor, Graham	Smith, Laura
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McNaughton, Monte	Surma, Kinga
Downey, Doug	Mulroney, Caroline	Tangri, Nina
Dunlop, Jill	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Flack, Rob	Pang, Billy	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fullerton, Merrilee	Parsa, Michael	Tibollo, Michael A.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Piccini, David	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ghamari, Goldie	Pierre, Natalie	Wai, Daisy
Gill, Parm	Pirie, George	Williams, Charmaine A.
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan	
Harris, Mike	Rae, Matthew	

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

#### Nays

Andrew, Jill	Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy
Bell, Jessica	Hsu, Ted	Schreiner, Mike
Blais, Stephen	Hunter, Mitzie	Shamji, Adil
Bourgouin, Guy	Karpoche, Bhutla	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Bowman, Stephanie	Kernaghan, Terence	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Mamakwa, Sol	Vanthof, John
Fife, Catherine	Mantha, Michael	Vaugeois, Lise
Fraser, John	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gates, Wayne	Rakocevic, Tom	

**The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Trevor Day):** The ayes are 67; the nays are 29.

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

*Second reading agreed to.*

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? Government House leader.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I refer it the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs.

#### VISITOR

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** I introduced her earlier; she wasn't here but she is now. My constituent Cheryl Crompton is here on the government side. It is her birthday today, and I hope you will all join me in wishing her a happy birthday.

Happy birthday.

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

*The House recessed from 1158 to 1300.*

#### ESTIMATES

**Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria:** I have a message from the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the Lieutenant Governor, signed by her own hand.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2023, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

#### PETITIONS

##### LAND USE PLANNING

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It gives me great pleasure to introduce the following petition on behalf of Brian Williams from my riding of London North Centre. It's titled "Protect the Greenbelt."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 23 is the Ford government's latest attempt to remove protected land from the greenbelt, allowing developers to bulldoze and pave over 7,000 acres of farmland in the greenbelt;

"Whereas Ontario is already losing 319.6 acres of farmland and green space daily to development;

"Whereas the government's Housing Affordability Task Force found there are plenty of places to build homes without destroying the greenbelt;

"Whereas Ford's repeated moves to tear up farmland and bulldoze wetlands have never been about housing, but are about making the rich richer;

"Whereas green spaces and farmland are what we rely on to grow our food, support natural habitats and prevent flooding;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately amend Bill 23, stop all plans to further remove protected land from the greenbelt and protect existing farmland in the province by passing the NDP's Protecting Agricultural Land Act."

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature and deliver it with page Eric to the Clerks.

##### LONG-TERM CARE

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** This petition is entitled "Support Bill 21, the Till Death Do Us Part Act."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there are 38,000 people on the wait-list for long-term care; and

"Whereas the median wait time for a long-term-care bed has risen from 99 days in 2011-12 to 171 days in 2020-21; and

"Whereas according to Home Care Ontario, the cost of a hospital bed is \$842 a day, while the cost of a long-term-care bed is \$126 a day; and

"Whereas couples should have the right to live together as they age; and

"Whereas Ontario seniors have worked hard to build this province and deserve dignity in care; and

"Whereas Bill 21 amends the Residents' Bill of Rights in the Fixing Long-Term Care Act to provide the resident with the right upon admission to continue to live with their spouse or partner;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Long-Term Care to pass Bill 21 and provide seniors with the right to live together as they age."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature to this petition and give it to Kalila.

##### SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**MPP Jamie West:** I want to thank Dr. Sally Palmer from McMaster University for designing this petition and getting it out.

"Petition to Raise Social Assistance Rates."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and soon \$1,227 for ODSP;

"Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);

"Whereas the recent small budget increase of 5% for ODSP still leaves these citizens well below the poverty line, both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to live in this time of alarming inflation;

"Whereas the government of Canada recognized in its CERB program that a basic income of \$2,000 per month was the standard support required by individuals who lost their employment during the pandemic;

"We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for OW and ODSP."

I support this petition. I'll sign it and give it to page Scarlett to deliver to the table.

## LAND USE PLANNING

**Mr. Mike Schreiner:** I'd like to thank members of my constituency and others for bringing forward this petition to protect the greenbelt.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Premier has persistently promised over the last four years not to develop the greenbelt; and

"Whereas the Premier has plans to build Highway 413 that would pave over 400 acres of the greenbelt, including over 2,000 acres of class 1 and class 2 farmland; and

"Whereas the government now has plans to open up over 7,400 acres of the greenbelt to his pro-sprawl developers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To instruct the Ontario government to immediately commit to cancelling Highway 413 and immediately halt all plans to develop the greenbelt and to instead invest in livable and affordable communities connected by transit that protect the nature that protects us, the farmland that feeds us, and mitigates climate pollution."

I wholeheartedly support this petition. I will sign it and ask page Oriana to bring it to the table.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Petitions?

Orders of the day. Government House leader.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** First, on a point of order, Speaker—

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** Point of order.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Pursuant to standing order 78, I wish to inform the House that tonight's evening meeting is cancelled.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROGRESS ON THE PLAN TO BUILD  
ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2022LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROGRESSION  
DU PLAN POUR BÂTIR  
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 5, 2022, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 36, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

**The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott):** I recognize the member for Waterloo.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It's my pleasure to respond to the government's third reading of Bill 36. I was here in the House this morning. This, of course, is the fall economic statement, the mini-budget for the province of Ontario. The mini-budget is supposed to happen around six months after the budget. It's supposed to be a course correction for the government of the day, to recognize what is happening in the province of Ontario, to adjust their investments—

where the resources are going, or where the resources are not going.

There are a couple of items in this bill which obviously caught our attention. One of them is the ODSP rate increase for the 6% of folks in the province of Ontario who are on the Ontario disability program—they can work and make up to \$1,000, instead of making up to \$200. We did hear from a delegation, during finance committee, who said that this is a step in the right direction, while also acknowledging, though, that only 6% of those who are on ODSP are able to work. But at least it's moving in the right direction. If the government is going to continue on this path of legislating poverty for those people who are on ODSP—then at least allowing 6% of the population to not be penalized for making up to \$1,000. And the other thing is the guaranteed income for seniors.

I will say, though, there's a vast majority that the government has missed—and we've been very vocal about this in this House and during question period and during finance committee.

My general feeling about budgets—and I feel like a lot of the people of this province agree with me—is that a budget is more than just a series of numbers on a page; it is an embodiment of our values. In other words, where the government is investing money should be reflective of what the people of the province need during that time.

## 1310

It's good to see that there are a number of students who have come to the Legislature this morning—because we also know from the Financial Accountability Officer that \$400 million did not get into the system in the last quarter of 2022. I feel like resources in education, in health care need to be re-evaluated on a constant basis—especially post-pandemic, because those were tough times for the health care system and for the education system.

I will say, as we are debating the mini-budget here, Bill 36, that it was astounding to learn that the Canadian Red Cross is now in a children's hospital in Ontario amid a surge in respiratory illnesses in children. I'm going to read from the Toronto Star article by Rosa Saba—and this is unprecedented. Children's hospitals have been under great duress because of a number of factors, and yet the government has not pivoted and responded in an appropriate way. Had they done that, had there been resources and funding allocated to health care, then CHEO would not have to call in the Canadian Red Cross to help with their unit.

"A prominent children's hospital in Ottawa will soon be receiving help from the Canadian Red Cross as it grapples with a massive wave of pediatric respiratory illnesses that have stretched resources to the breaking point....

"CHEO, previously known as the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, requested the additional support amid a surge of admissions from children and youth"—and remember, Madam Speaker, that this is coming after CHEO just created a second pediatric unit, because there was such pressure on that hospital. So small teams are going in.



“CHEO opened a second intensive care unit in November to treat what it called an unprecedented number of critically ill babies and children”—and this is specialized care. I think that needs to be stressed for this government.

“Government data showed that only 10 of the 130 beds in Ontario’s pediatric intensive care units were free as of December 1”—and that was Thursday. “At times last month, the number of pediatric patients exceeded the number of ICU beds available system-wide.”

This is what CHEO said: “We have redeployed staff and medical staff from surgical and medical care units, added extra beds and workers in our pediatric intensive care and emergency departments as well as inpatient units.... Everyone at CHEO has been going all out to take care of kids and their families.”

So the hospitals, the nurses, the doctors and now the Red Cross are doing everything that they can to make sure that our youngest and most vulnerable patients in Ontario get the care they need, and yet the fall economic statement had no additional resources recognizing how important and how crucial these resources are.

A quote from the same article: ““This is a situation in which it was our responsibility as the adults in the room, it was our responsibility to do everything that we could to help to make sure that our youngest were healthy, and that every environment was safe for them....”

“According to Public Health Ontario, as of November 6 only 7% of children in the province aged six months to five years had received a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. But experts say it’s those youngest kids who are at higher risk of hospitalization from COVID-19 compared to other children and teens.” So you have a gap here.

“Children’s hospitals in Ontario have been cutting back on surgeries to ease pressure on pediatric intensive care units and emergency rooms.”

So the key piece in here, as it always is in health care, is the prevention piece: How do you keep people healthy? Well, clearly, with a vaccination rate of only 6%, the province of Ontario is not doing the best that it can.

When I reviewed the Auditor General’s report, it was astounding to me to learn how messed up the vaccination program was in the province of Ontario. This is from the report that was just released last Wednesday:

“The Ministry of Health and Ministry of the Solicitor General”—and these were her findings—“did not consistently adopt advice from experts and key stakeholders, health care organizations and workers when formulating their vaccination strategies. The Ministry of Health decided not to implement a vaccine mandate on hospital workers, indicating that its decision was informed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health’s analysis of evidence available at that time.... When identifying high-risk populations for the ‘hot spot’ strategy to prioritize vaccination when vaccines were scarce”—and I don’t know if you remember, but this House was seized with the question of, where were the vaccines? They were commonly regarded as the Hunger Games, and there was no rhyme or reason as to who was getting a vaccination

clinic, who was getting a mobile unit, why core areas were being ignored. Some of these areas had the most vulnerable workers. They were the ones who were working in the grocery stores, in the big box stores, on the front line, on transit. Things still had to keep going, but these people were last on the list to have access to their vaccinations.

Again, this is from the report. This disorganization “resulted in eight lower-risk neighbourhood receiving vaccines ahead of high-risk neighbourhoods, and nine higher-risk neighbourhoods being excluded from the hot spot strategy.”

Public health units surveyed said they did not think the ministry had clear lines of responsibility for the vaccine rollout. Public health experts were not included in the provincial vaccine task force until months later. The AG said that the province’s communication strategy for supporting vaccine programs was not effective.

So when you look a year ahead and see our emergency rooms overwhelmed—if they’re open—and see the most vulnerable children having not received clear communication about why vaccines are important, and you look at where the money went and where the money didn’t go during this vaccine process, you can see the result. Those decisions about resource allocation make a difference; they matter—and they matter for the front-line health care workers as well.

“COVID-19 vaccines and vaccinations ... Ontarians may not have been as well-informed as possible in their decision-making.” The auditor “found that the ministry missed out on opportunities to educate and inform the public on the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines.... Health experts ... believed the government’s communication approach sometimes undermined public confidence in vaccinations.” There were mixed messages coming directly from the Premier and the Premier’s office about what was safe and what was not.

I hope that you’ll remember, Madam Speaker, when there was police tape on children’s park equipment, and meanwhile, the medical officer of health was saying—especially for those children and families who don’t have access to a backyard, so the park was the place where they were able to get some exercise and get some fresh air.

The other interesting part, when you look at where the money was going and where the money didn’t go, is, the ministry’s compensation structure encouraged doctors to work at mass immunization clinics where they could bill higher than they could if they vaccinated people at their office. This ran counter to common knowledge. You’re going to go to your trusted family doctor to get a shot, to get that information and to have the follow-up too, and also to build trust—but that’s not how the government decided that it was best. So they had these mass clinics where physicians could charge up to \$220 an hour, nurses got up to \$49 an hour, and pharmacists got up to \$57 an hour. “Private sector operators”—and we also made a big deal about this during the height of the pandemic—“paid more to various professionals compared to what not-for-profit organizations” did, and there was no oversight from the Ministry of Health or the Solicitor General.

In the end, “Ontario had wasted at least 3.4 million in COVID-19 vaccine doses as of June 30, 2022”—just six months ago, as the election was happening. And there were a number of other for-profit organizations that wasted 20% to 57% of their vaccines. The government went through a very sloppy procurement process to hire these organizations to distribute vaccines.

At the end of the day, vaccines were wasted—missed opportunities all over the province—and then you have, today, one of the medical experts at CHEO saying this is a problem because only 6% or 7% of this very vulnerable part of the population have received their vaccines.

**1320**

So where you put your resources impacts the health outcomes of the population that we’re serving. Wasting \$3.4 million is never okay in health care, especially when this government has been crying poor for so long—that they can’t pay our front-line health care workers an appropriate wage, that Bill 124 was necessary because 1% was fair. We know now how unfair that was. We know now what kind of negative impact that had on the people of this province and the human health workforce in the province of Ontario.

We brought forward a motion from our member for Nickel Belt on behalf of His Majesty’s opposition, and that strategy called for eight serious points to positively impact the retention of health care workers and to make people feel more comfortable entering into this field. And I’ll never forget it, because I’ve never seen anything quite like it in this House—when the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health mocked the crisis. She actually mocked our genuine concern, when we were reflecting the Ontario Hospital Association and the five major organizations that employ nurses in Ontario.

We’ve always said this—and actually, this is something that the member for Nickel Belt has said for years now: You’ll never address a problem successfully or with any integrity if you ignore the fact that the problem exists, if you don’t acknowledge that the problem exists—and that’s what we’ve seen. We even saw that this morning, in the response to our questions around CHEO—“We have a plan.”

A nurse came to the finance committee via Skype or via Zoom, and she was very clear. I said, “Jackie, the minister says they have a plan and it’s working. Can you comment on that?” She said, “I see no evidence of a plan.” I said, “The government says that Bill 124 has no bearing or impact on your morale. You are health care heroes, and you’re doing your job, and Bill 124 doesn’t matter.” She said, “It has a detrimental impact on the morale of the workforce. We feel devalued. We feel disrespected.” And then I said to her, “The Premier says that this is not a resource issue.” She said, “This is absolutely a resource issue. We do not have what we need on a regular basis in our hospitals.”

In fact, the hospital in Kingston put out a call for donations just this past weekend. A professor has recognized that when you are dealing with small children in intensive care units, there is specialized equipment that

you need; it is smaller, it is delicate, it is more intrinsic. They put out a call for donations because they have a resource issue.

So why would a government, in November 2022, bring forward a budget that does not address the core needs of the health care sector? Most people, like myself, regard our public health care system as something to fight for, something to protect, something to maintain. It is a core part of the values that we have as Ontarians. And yet, in this budget, there is no new money recognizing what’s happening just down the street, on University Avenue.

The finance minister also said several things this morning around building. I found this very interesting, the building part—because the coroner’s report came out as well. The government has talked a fair amount about boosting skilled trades and about ensuring that—we have a deficit; there is a labour shortage. I think my one message to the Minister of Labour and to the finance minister on this is, one of the best ways to encourage more people to go into the skilled trades is to make sure that their workplaces are safe.

We have the coroner’s report. The jury recommendations came out from the 2014 trench collapse, and they’ve been rejected by the Ministry of Labour. This was just posted yesterday, and it reads as follows:

“Ontario’s Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development says it reviews all recommendations from coroner’s juries ‘carefully,’” but they have “rejected all 10 recommendations a coroner’s jury has made in an inquest into the death of a construction worker in a trench collapse eight years ago”—eight years ago.

“The ministry, which is not required to accept recommendations from a coroner’s jury, says all the concerns raised in the inquest have already been addressed.”

And yet the latest number that I have is, 41 construction workers have died this year. So for the Ministry of Labour to say, “We are addressing all of these concerns,” and then also say at the same time, “We want more people to go into the construction sector and the skilled trades”—I really need to emphasize this: When one worker is unsafe, all workers are unsafe, and therefore you have an unsafe workplace. People are not going to be drawn into those workplace settings if they don’t feel safe.

It’s very similar to what’s happening in our hospitals right now, with our nurses. Many nurses—and I met with the Waterloo region nurses’ association, and they said that even when people come into the hospital, they do a few shifts and they don’t come back. That is how hostile and how stressful those workplace environments are. Disrespecting workers is not working for workers.

Just on the recommendations that came out—this concerns Michael Picanco, who was 35 when he died in a trench that collapsed on a construction site in Toronto. “The ministry’s rejection of the recommendations comes” just two weeks “after two workers died last August in a trench collapse in Ajax, Ont. The three-day inquest into Picanco’s death began on October 25”—that’s the backlog in the justice system too, I just want to say. When a worker

dies, that inquest, those recommendations, should be paid attention to, and they should be expedited.

These were just some of the jury's recommendations:

—“more unannounced inspections”—that would be great;

—“mandatory trench safety training for workers;

—“stronger penalties for companies with repeated safety violations;

—“a requirement for health and safety representatives at smaller work sites.”

Patty Coates, president of the OFL, said, “What we're seeing now is long, drawn-out coroner's inquests that dredge everything up for the families, and then the Ministry of Labour simply says ‘no’ to every recommendation that could save another worker's life.”

Targeting repeat offenders is also something that needs to happen. The Auditor General has identified this in the past. Companies that have violations still win contracts from this government. Where are the checks and balances? Where is the accountability?

I want to encourage the Minister of Labour to have another look at this because I believe that when a government, in its entirety, rejects recommendations from a coroner's inquest like this—which was extensive—then that signals to the people who are considering entering the skilled trades that the government is not that concerned about the health and well-being of workers on sites; it reads that they are expendable, and we've seen this.

When I first came to this House in 2012, the Tony Dean report had been tabled in the wake of the 2009 swing stage collapse in Toronto. At that time, a young man in my riding, Nick Lalonde—I say his name every year, when I'm talking about safety, He was 23 at the time, the age of my son. There was a lack of training. There was a lack of accountability. There were very few repercussions; very few consequences—the company, for Nick, I think, was fined \$125,000.

I believe this company was fined \$75,000 for not having the proper health and safety measures on the work site.

What a disservice we do to the young generation in Ontario if we don't protect their health and well-being and safety while in the workplace. Every worker who goes to work in the morning should come home to their family at the end of the day—everybody says it, but you can't just hope and cross your fingers to make that a reality. We have a lot of work in the province of Ontario to make sure that our workplaces are safer.

Regarding Bill 36, obviously, an investment in worker safety needs to happen—the health care system. The disconnect is astounding in this place with regard to what is actually happening in our health care system.

**1330**

This story just came out today, and when you read it, it's really—especially if you have a close family member who is expecting a baby or if you've just had a baby. CBC Ottawa covered the story of the Duval family—it just happened this weekend. Kendra Duval had a birth plan and was supposed to go to the hospital in Winchester. When a

baby is coming, a baby is coming. It's not like you can say, “Oh, no, we have to wait for the emergency room or the labour delivery staff to actually be there to make it happen.” She went on to say that the couple chose to have their child at Winchester District Memorial Hospital. It was a half hour away. They found out very late that the doctor had to help another induction and that there were no resources for her to have her baby there. They scrambled to try to find another hospital, another place for her to have the baby—even as she's in the middle of labour. She said to her husband, “I've spent nine, 10 months doing everything I can to protect this baby and make sure that he's safe. And now I feel like everything is in jeopardy again because maybe we won't have help in the moment, whenever the time comes.” And that is the key piece. That's what people expect from our health care system—they expect it to be there when they need it.

Even this past weekend, Norfolk emergency room closed, following a series of small rural community ER closures.

She went on to say that when the time came, there were two days of early labour—this is high stress for this woman. To find out that these short-term closures—that's what they're called now in Ontario, because they do not have the people.

The finance minister talks about building Ontario up. You cannot build Ontario up without the people.

It is interesting to note how many hospitals are having these short closures for their ERs: “Across the province this year, 25 hospitals have temporarily closed their birthing units at least once since July 6”—and that's really just when Ontario started tracking the closures and tracking the problem.

Ontario Health, unfortunately, would not provide CBC a list of which hospitals closed birth units.

It is important to note that since July 6, 25 hospitals in Ontario have temporarily closed their birthing units because they didn't have the resources. This is a resource issue.

A budget provides resources for the health care system. So this is a fall economic statement and a mini-budget that does not meet the needs of the people of this province; we cannot say it enough.

This couple were denied at Ottawa's Queensway Carleton Hospital, so they ended up back at Winchester. She was completely panicked. She said that she was erratic and everything was happening so fast. She said, “I can't do this, I'm going to die, I just didn't feel safe.” Does this sound like a positive, no-problem-here kind of issue? I don't think so—in fact, I know so. The umbilical cord was wrapped around this baby's neck. It was too short to be removed. It had to be cut. So the nurse, the doctor—it was all hands on deck at that point to make sure that this baby was okay.

I just want to leave you with one quote that she said at the very end of this article, because it's very powerful. She said, “We deserve better...” The nurses did their best. It's not their fault. But the system failed them, because their experience was so traumatic.

People who have babies in Ontario should not have traumatic experiences. They should not be scrambling to find a place to have a baby. I think that this is the missing part of the narrative from this government, when they consistently and constantly say, “We have a plan”—this experience for this couple was not a plan.

Various medical health experts predicted that this would happen after so many years of underfunding. In fact, it is hard to believe that the Financial Accountability Officer, in this year, has said that the government under-spent by \$900 million. We trust the Financial Accountability Officer because that officer is non-partisan, that officer is independent, and they actually measure every quarter—where the money is going or where the money is not going. Increasingly, the pattern for this government is that they say, “Oh, the health care system needs this amount of money,” and then they fail to get that money out, even when they know there’s a crisis. So it’s really discouraging.

If you’re paying attention, if you’re really connected to your community and you’re listening to the informed voices in your community, you will know that by this time in Ontario, there have been 50 femicides in Ontario—50 women in this province, to date, have been killed by somebody they know. Someone specifically killed them, murdered them, because they were a woman.

Jennifer Hutton from Women’s Crisis Services of Waterloo Region is someone I deeply respect. They stretch their dollars as far as they can. It is incredible how they meet the needs of a community to the best of their ability. But at times this year, Women’s Crisis Services had to “turn people away because our 90 shelter beds are full. With the affordable housing crisis, families are staying with us for upwards of one year if not longer.”

So you have women who have enough courage to flee a violent partner and bring their children with them, and they show up to one of the only places, and because Women’s Crisis Services’ funding has not been annualized for child and youth in shelter and rural and remote funding—that has still not happened. The increased base funding to ensure staffing levels and essential programming and to reflect the increased costs of running residential programs—that has not happened; to enhance initial investment in transitional housing and annualize this funding—that has not happened; to provide for youth education. They saw 400 youth through their shelter at Women’s Crisis Services last year.

The Renfrew county inquest, which was a call to formally declare intimate partner violence an epidemic—this year, 50 women were murdered, intentionally, because they were women. Was there additional funding in the fall economic statement to address this crisis? No, there was not.

She did try to get on the list to come and speak to the committee, but obviously—she missed the deadline, I think, by two minutes and wasn’t able to get on the list. But I felt it was really important to bring these concerns to the floor of the Legislature—because the government has said that we say “no.” Yes, we say “no” to a budget that

doesn’t meet the needs of the people we serve. That’s what we’re doing, because we’re not going to support a budget that doesn’t address the crisis in health care, the crisis in mental health, the crisis in domestic violence.

People say, “Oh, you say ‘crisis’ too much.” Well, when I tell you a story of a family who couldn’t find a place to have their baby in the Ottawa area, and that things could have gone very sideways very quickly, that is a crisis, and it certainly is not a situation that the parliamentary assistant should mock when we bring it to the floor of this Legislature.

Moving on, though—because you could really talk about health care for a long time, because it is the primary concern, I think, that comes into our offices.

The other key piece of the affordability issue in Ontario—and I didn’t even get into the privatization of health care, because I’d need another hour—is the housing crisis. This morning, several of the PC members talked about housing and 1.5 million homes, and yet they’ve introduced a piece of legislation, Bill 23, which runs counter to the goal of improving the affordability of housing and of getting housing built. And it’s backed by several experts—there’s one expert, actually, from the University of Waterloo, and I know the minister knows her. Her name is Dawn Parker. She did offer to consult on Bill 23. If you’re going to try to bring a housing bill forward, then listen to the people who actually know what they’re talking about. Base the legislation on evidence. Dawn Cassandra Parker is a professor at the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo. I know the minister thinks highly of the University of Waterloo. She said the policies of Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act, will not increase housing affordability—that’s her biggest concern right now—because its provisions to require high-rise zoning to increase development profitability will contribute to land-value uplift, or rising land prices. We’ve seen some people really benefit from rising land prices.

**1340**

She also said that the incentivized high-rise builds provide expensive housing, not affordable housing. Actually, we heard this at Bill 23—the committee—as well; I sat in on that for a while. Basically, if you’re talking about affordability of housing—and the metaphor was a bathtub. If you’re filling that bathtub up and you’re trying to fill it with affordable housing—this government has left the plug out, and we’re losing the affordable housing, because now we know that 86% of new housing in Ontario, especially in rental form, is \$3,000 and above. That’s unaffordable for so many people. At the same time, we’re down to 38% of affordability rents around the \$1,000 mark and under.

There are a lot of people in Waterloo, which is fairly affluent, as an area—poverty hides really well in some places. In Waterloo, we’re seeing more and more homelessness, and people are shocked. But when you look at the housing prices—we have a community called Sunnydale. The corporate landlord from Toronto has increased the rent by 5%. These are mostly refugees. These are mostly

new immigrants. These are mostly people who are genuinely living hand to mouth. They are making minimum wage, which, you'll remember, the government froze back in 2018. During the pandemic, the average lost wages during that time period was about \$7,000—\$7,000. This is a government that talks about, "We're going to get our hands out of your pocket. We're going to put more money in your pocket." And yet, this government really removed a lot of expendable income from very marginalized people.

Finally, on the supply piece, she recommends incentivizing repurposing of parking lots for housing through subsidizing multi-level parking and reducing or eliminating parking requirements, allowing at least four units on residential parcels, and implementing non-principal residence vacant-unit taxes.

So there are solutions to the housing crisis; they just don't happen to involve the greenbelt.

The government's own housing task force has said very clearly to this minister and to this entire Legislature that Ontario has enough land to build the needed housing units and stock that we need. There's no need to infringe on the greenbelt. So that's where we are with that.

Finally, just to circle back to the health care piece: The Waterloo Region Health Coalition held an event in Waterloo not that long ago—I think it was last week, actually. Really interesting stats—according to the coalition, there were 937 hospital beds in Waterloo region in 1961, well before I was born. They serviced, at that time, just 172,000 people. In 2020, we have 20 fewer beds than we had in 1961, based on our population of 620,000 people. So it's proof that the resources and the funding need to be there.

According to the Ontario Nurses' Association, there are now 140 registered vacancies in Kitchener and Waterloo. We have seen—because I was at Grand River not that long ago—that people have just had it; they're retiring early, or they're choosing other careers, or they're going to other districts. Bill 124 has had a cooling effect on the entire sector.

When I was reviewing the decision based on Bill 124, through the courts—the finding around Bill 124 was very clear: It violated the Charter of Rights. The government provided no rationale for even extending to moving over into those charter rights and essentially running them over.

Remember, this legislation came in 2019. So the impact of wage suppression legislation has been clearly felt. There was no excuse for the finance minister to not recommend repealing Bill 124; now the courts have done that for you. They've decided that this legislation is null and void and reparations will happen. The reparations can be up to \$8 billion. That is what the initial finding was. The 10 specific unions that took the government to court are going to have to seek those reparations separately.

But of course, the government is going to fight for this legislation. The Premier and the minister have said, "No, we don't accept this." So this will continue a long-standing tradition of this government—to spend a lot of money in

court, but then to block us from finding out how much money the government is spending.

And if you were on this side and we were doing the same thing, you would have none of it.

It goes hand in hand with your mandate letters, which this government has never revealed. We have legitimate questions about what's in those mandate letters, given where you're putting public money—into private health care. We want to see those mandate letters. Right now, I believe it's with the Supreme Court and it's pending there. I suspect you will lose that too, because one of the core principles and tenets of our democracy is transparency—but we should tell that to this government, because they've been anything but transparent, which is why it is important to have the Auditor General report and the Financial Accountability Officer's report as well.

So Bill 124—not listening to the core people who have made these really powerful testimonies to the government, including Jackie, who was in finance committee. The members who sit on that committee should be red-faced about this, because she basically told it like it is. Bill 124 is part of the problem. Wage suppression legislation is driving nurses out of the province of Ontario. And now we have the Canadian Red Cross in the children's hospital in Ottawa. You can connect the dots on this.

With regard to Bill 36, though—Bill 23 runs counter to the goals the finance minister expressed this morning. You cannot build a province up if you're not supporting the people who are part of that building process—and this goes from everyone from health care workers to the construction workers I talked about earlier. And then you have a growing recognition—the members of the government side must feel it in some regard.

I'm going to quote from a Hamilton Spectator editorial from last week:

"The Ford government tried to improve the optics around one of the two most contentious issues in Ontario right now—the crisis threatening to break our hospitals ... particularly around how many children are getting sick at a time when McMaster Children's Hospital is running at 140% of its capacity." The Premier made a phone call that day—and I have to say, I think this hospital deserves more than a phone call.

"A phone call to share the pain isn't exactly what patients, families and health care workers need at this point.

"They need help, not a hug from the Premier."

The commentary from the Minister of Health at these press conferences, which are heavily scripted and heavily messaged—refused to recognize that the system is in crisis. It actually has not been said.

This editorial went on to say, "Those 13-hour waits, kids not getting ICU care, kids being sent for treatment to adult facilities"—and this was on CTV News last night, and it's something that I hadn't thought about. When you send a 13- or 14-year-old to an adult unit—the nurse said, "These are still kids. They're still scared." There's a reason why we have pediatric units—because they have

specialized care for children. Someone who is 13 or 14 is still a kid.

The minister “no doubt intended to make people feel better,” by saying, “We’re doing everything,” but “she ended up sounding horribly out of touch and even”—I can’t say that word; it’s unparliamentary, so I’ll catch myself.

**1350**

The editorial from the Hamilton Spectator went on to say, “But how about the thousands of other kids and families left waiting?” Hospitals are triaging. They’re triaging because they don’t have the people and they don’t have the resources. “They are hardly getting appropriate and timely treatment. For Jones to suggest otherwise is, frankly, an insult to those sick kids, families and the health workers” the Premier “cavalierly calls heroes.” The nurses have actually pushed back on this hero talk for quite some time.

The editorial went on to a solution: “Repeal Bill 124, which freezes nurses’ salaries or caps raises at 1%, which amounts to a pay cut in inflationary times. We have previously called for that more than once. It’s unfair and inequitable legislation which penalizes nurses, especially compared to other comparable front-line workers like police officers and firefighters”—which are male-dominated.

I asked the finance minister in committee about this. I said, “Minister, have you costed out repealing Bill 124? You’re either going to pay now or pay later. Why not pay it now and restore some hope and some credibility to the health care system? Have you had that conversation around the table?” He was kind of flippant with me. He said, “Oh, your response is always, ‘Get rid of Bill 124.’” Well, we’ve identified it as a problem. We’ve listened to the front-line workers in the health care system. They have clearly articulated that this is a piece of legislation which is part of the problem, and yet the government refuses to deal with it.

The money is there to deal with Bill 124. The money is there to pay health care workers respectfully and to retain them—because it costs more to actually go through that hiring process and train a new nurse.

It went on to say, “You probably know that nurses have left hospitals by the thousands. What you might not know is that the nursing staffing shortage is forcing hospitals to use private agencies to provide nursing staff. Or that nurses employed by such agencies earn considerably more than nurses in the public sector. Or that agencies themselves then charge a premium for their services, which hospitals have to pay.”

So it is costing the health care system more money. Bill 124 is fiscally irresponsible because the dollars that are going into the system are not benefiting the people in the system; they’re benefiting people outside of the system, and mostly these for-profit agencies.

Finally, it said, “So rather than give nurses a decent wage increase that keeps pace with inflation, the government is forcing hospitals, which are already strapped, to pay a premium to cover staffing shortages that the government, in part, caused. Now you know that, too. Perhaps

you should let Ford and Jones know as well, since they don’t seem to know what is really going on in Ontario hospitals.”

I fully agree with that editorial from the Hamilton Spectator—and that is actually what I hear from people in the Waterloo region on the regular.

I’m running out of time.

Bill 36 has a very contentious piece on pension reform. I want to get this on the record. I raised it at finance committee. We’ve done some consultation with various stakeholders. On page 72 of the fall economic statement, the government outlined a plan to implement a target benefit plan pension framework. This is a bit of a “hangover” from the Liberals—to use the Minister of Energy’s term from today. They started down this road because the Liberals promised everybody in the province of Ontario a pension. In the 2014 election, that was the issue at the door. People thought that if they voted for the Liberals they were automatically going to get a pension. Of course, that was based on their advertising, which the Auditor General had to call into question. Then, this government changed the rules around advertising—and she has also found that this government is doing exactly the same thing.

However, be that as it may, we can learn from other jurisdictions. New Brunswick has embraced this new target benefit plan pension framework, and they’re 10 years in, and what has happened in 10 years is that the defined benefit plans have now slipped over to target. Why is that important? Because target pension plans traditionally are just that: a target. And the target can move if the pension plan does not perform well. Like defined contribution plans, it shifts the risk of performance of the investment from the employer to the pensioner.

I wanted to raise this because, right now in New Brunswick, they face legal challenges over the change. I feel like this government—you’ve been in court a long time. A lot of lawyers have made a lot of money under this government, but this is something that we should learn from. Stakeholders note that the pension plan model shifted the risk of bearing financial market volatility almost entirely onto the plan members, which runs counter to the idea of having a pension. The pension should keep pace with the cost of living and inflation, so that when you have a pension, you don’t find yourself not having enough money.

Very few people have pensions, or a growing number do not, and so the people who do have one need to know that this government may be moving in the model where you have target benefit pension plans. The federal government backed off of this because the unions and retiree organizations pushed back hard on it because of, they claimed, wage theft. So their defined benefit pensions were a form of deferred wages.

I have to say that the response from the minister on this one is that, “Well, we’re going to start the consultation.” We did move a motion. We tried to amend the fall economic statement, to no avail, because the government has a majority.

Okay, I have 11 minutes left.

I wanted to address the general gist of what's going on here, what we can see is happening. What is actually validated by the Auditor General's report that was released last week is that there does seem to be a very concerted effort, Madam Speaker, to really unravel our democracy. It may look a little chaotic in some regard, but it does seem very, very mindful.

This is from a *Globe and Mail* editorial, which I quite liked because it sort of summed up how I felt about the government. It goes on to say that when the government was first elected, they said that this would be the first-ever government of the people, ignoring, of course, Bill Davis and various other strong Premiers. They even gave each other these little placards for their desks. Do you remember that?

**Interjection:** "For the people."

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** "For the people." If you've got to have a placard on your desk saying that you're here for the people, you may be in the wrong job, I just want to say.

"Most people saw that random assertion as garden-variety political gas; a meaningless slogan from an inexperienced populist who had lucked into his party's leadership at the last moment. What no one could foresee at the time was how truly vacuous it would turn out to be." This is the *Globe and Mail* editorial—just saying.

It goes on to say, "Last week, his recently re-elected government tabled a bill that, if adopted, will sacrifice a fundamental tenet of democracy—majority rule—on the altar of his political agenda." This is called the Better Municipal Governance Act, otherwise known as Bill 39: "The mayors of Toronto and Ottawa will be able to adopt or amend bylaws with just one third of the vote on their councils."

This is unprecedented, Madam Speaker. Nobody else, not even that newish Premier in Alberta, is going down this road. In fact, they're going to have to walk back some of their draconian legislation.

"The lone caveat is that those bylaws must relate in a still undefined way to priorities that the Ford government will name at a later date..."

Let's just unpack that a little bit. The government is going to give these two mayors, for now, these additional powers to override a duly elected council just in the last election, but only if the municipal council aligns with whatever the Ford government's priorities are. And we still don't even know what those priorities are.

They go on to say, "There are so many ways this is wrong. Let's start with the fact that it's utterly unnecessary."

**1400**

We do know that municipalities are creatures of the provincial government. This Premier seems to be very fascinated by that concept, which is why we saw the "notwithstanding" clause come into effect in the 2018 municipal election, and then he did it again with the Strong Mayors Building Homes Act: "Among other things, that law gives the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa the power to veto bylaws and override council decisions, again in the

name of provincial priorities," but undefined provincial priorities. "Councils would have been able to overturn a mayoral veto with a two-thirds supermajority vote. Now even that modest check on the mayors' new powers has disappeared."

It was interesting seeing John Tory this weekend in a press conference saying that the loss of revenue—because there has been some language that somehow the provincial government is going to make the city of Toronto whole again, indicating that they won't take a financial price for the loss of development charges. He said very clearly that even the concept that municipalities have hundreds of millions of dollars that they're just sitting on, saving for a rainy day—his word was "ridiculous." So it's interesting to see. I guess you have to be careful what you ask for or what you wish for, because now the mayor of Toronto has got a new set of problems.

Basically, this is the state of affairs right now: The government is not content with overriding some basic tenets of democracy here in this Legislature, but now they want municipalities to essentially do their bidding for them. We've heard that on Bill 39 at committee, and you have to wonder why our democracy is so inconvenient for this PC government, Madam Speaker.

This is the final line: "Doing so would present political challenges, so rather than use the popular franchise" the Premier "earned by winning a majority of seats in the Ontario Legislature, he intends to pervert the democratic principle that put him in power and let a minority on the Toronto and Ottawa councils do his bidding.

"It is almost impossible to believe that this is happening in Canada"—almost impossible, and yet here we are.

I have to say, municipalities across the province are reeling from this. I did write all the five lower-tier, and then I approached the region of Waterloo, and I'm going to get numbers from them, because they are quantifying the impact of Bill 23. The minister has said they're just sitting on this money, and they have said no, because there's a five-year economic forecast, a capital forecast that municipalities try to plan for, and it has to be in a measured way, because there is a skilled worker shortage. And they've said very clearly to this minister, "If you had consulted with us, we do have solutions," especially like inclusionary zoning.

We heard at committee about regulating and legalizing rooming houses. Not everybody can afford an apartment or a house. There are a lot of creative solutions out there, Madam Speaker, and people feel very strongly about their greenbelt, as they should.

Meanwhile, I heard the language this morning, as well, from several of the members: "We have to be cautious. We have to be careful." We haven't seen any evidence of cautious or careful around the fiscal management of some of this funding. In fact, we have an Auditor General's report that clearly articulates a huge amount of waste in Ontario. Maybe I should have started with the waste, because I could have spent a lot of time on this. But I did reference the 3.4 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, as of June 30, that were destroyed, that we couldn't use.

The OLG awarded certain contracts based on weak bids, especially in the west GTA contract awarded to Great Canadian, and after assigning casino contracts, three contractors successfully renegotiated them with lower revenue projections, resulting in \$3.3 billion in less revenue to the province over 10 years.

The Auditor General said the Ontario government spent \$13.75 million on ads she believes are partisan, which is nearly 20% of all the advertising that happens in the province. Then about \$3.5 billion—\$3.5 billion—of the \$7 billion spent on COVID-19-related contracts were non-competitive procurements between March 2020 and March 2022.

A lot of money came into this province during that time. A lot of that money was federal money. I think it warrants some attention, because what we saw was, of those COVID measures that the government owned, 94% were on the federal tab—94% of the money that went to COVID measures during the height of the pandemic was on the federal tab. Health care spending in Ontario is expected to be the equivalent of \$1,180 a person during that time, but only \$160 of that was on the province's tab.

This government has been very good at selling this concept that they're doing their due diligence, but thankfully we have an Auditor General's report. I asked the question of the finance minister last week around the money laundering that is happening in our casinos, and he seemed more concerned about the Auditor General's method of exposing that laundering than he was about the actual laundering of the money that is happening in the casinos.

Finally, we have this really strange thing. The government decided that they were going to give licence plate sticker rebates. They know of this case. I asked the finance minister in the committee. One person received \$38,000 from Ontario's licence plate sticker refund program, while some \$32 million ended up with people who appeared to own five cars. I asked a very simple question of the minister. I said, "I don't think that the government intended that people get \$40,000 so that they don't have to pay their licence sticker fees, but clearly this is a design flaw. Are you going to fix it?" That remains the question of the day.

In summary, I have to say, aside from the ODSP and the seniors' guaranteed income piece, this is a budget, once again, that misses the mark on so many levels. And the damage, which I generally am concerned about, is, how are we going to build back stronger when the government doesn't recognize that the funding and the resource issue in our health care system is very real, that people's lives are stake, that our education system and the skilled trades are issues that have to be carried out with some dignity, some integrity and, at the end of the day, yes, with some resources?

ANNUAL REPORT,  
CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** I beg to inform the House that the following document was

tabled: the 2020-21 annual report of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario.

VISITORS

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Point of order, the member from Scarborough Southwest.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** It is my absolute pleasure to introduce to the House, if you'll allow, Speaker, young Leia Furtado, a grade 4 student who actually started her own school cleanup crew, a committee called the Litter Mittee—like "committee"—at Birchcliff Heights. With her we have a front-line hero, a nurse, Jennifer Furtado, as well as her brother, Benjamin Furtado, who is a grade 6 student

I also have our placement student from York University, Shivan Gaba, who has been a wonderful addition to our legislative office. Please give them a big round of applause and welcome them to the House.

PROGRESS ON THE PLAN TO BUILD  
ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2022

LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROGRESSION  
DU PLAN POUR BÂTIR  
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I appreciate and I thank the member for her comments. I want to start by thanking her for mentioning the ODSP changes as well as the GAINS changes as elements of Bill 36 that, if I heard correctly, she could support.

I want to ask, though, about health care funding, because she commented in her remarks about it being a resource issue. On this side, we acknowledge that and would say that we're spending more on health care in Ontario than has ever been spent before. The budget increased by a whopping \$5.6 billion year over year, which is about 7%. Doesn't that allow the member to say, "Yes, we have the resources here," and support Bill 36?

1410

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I thank the member for the question. You have to remember, the government says that you're spending this much money, but the FAO says that \$900 million didn't get spent in the last year. That's almost a billion dollars. It's a lot of money that didn't get into the system. What we have consistently said to the government is that this money should be there. And then you also have Bill 124, where hospitals are spending two, three times the amount on nursing. That's fiscally irresponsible. Bill 124 has to go. Reparations have to be made, and confidence back in that system has to be rebuilt, because this government has stubbornly been attached to Bill 124.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Questions?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I met with OMA recently and learned of the devastating family doctor shortages that



we're seeing across the province. In my community, in midtown, at 1366 Yonge Street, we have a wonderful medical centre that offers many services across the spectrum. There's a pharmacy at the bottom. It helps many of our seniors have ready, accessible, community-based medical services. This is, of course, being torn down to build what we suspect will be, once again, luxury condos that no one can afford.

I'm wondering if the member could share if the fall economic statement says anything, really, about building real affordable housing and if it says anything about dealing with the crisis we have in front-line health care workers, like our doctors, like our nurses, like the very people at 1366 Yonge Street, who need their medical centre to stay alive and well.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much for the question. Many people would say that housing is health care, because when you do not have shelter, you are more vulnerable as an individual. You obviously don't have shelter from that storm. So no, Bill 36, as a mini budget, did not course-correct on the needed direct investment and building of public housing that this government needs to build, because—I have said it before—the private sector is not going to build deeply affordable housing, because the private sector is looking to make a profit. That is part of their job. It is the government's job to create a strategy and a plan to create housing so that people can stay safe, so that people can stay healthy.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Question?

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** Thanks for the member from Waterloo's presentation. We know affordability measures, like the gas tax cut, work. When the gas prices were slowing this past summer, the Statistics Canada consumer price index for July reported that the gas price fell the most in Ontario out of any other province because of this temporary gas tax cut.

Speaker, my question is simple: Will the member opposite support this proposed measure to extend the gas tax cut till the end of next year to help Ontario fight historical high inflation?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** The member is quite right: We are facing historical high inflation. So if you're looking at affordability measures across the province, you're looking at housing, you're looking at groceries, you're looking at transit—public transit. And there are a lot of people in this province who depend heavily on public options other than the car.

The interesting thing about the gas tax—and we would have included this amendment had we been able to—is that this is another financial hit to municipalities. So not only is this government, through Bill 23, hurting them by lost development charges fees—and we're quantifying that right now—but there are so many other things that this government could be doing to really acknowledge the pain that people in this province are experiencing. That includes addressing price gouging in grocery stores, for instance. That's why we're seeing food bank usage up 30%.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Question?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I want to thank the member for her presentation. You know when you have finished an hour and you run out of time talking about this that there are significant issues that need to be addressed. So I want to thank her for her presentation, which was informative.

My question is regarding the Premier's recent comment just a little while ago, I believe, when he came to the children's hospital in Ottawa. I'm sure everyone knows that CHEO had to recently call in the Red Cross to help, and the Premier said that he is glad that they're thinking outside the box. Instead of taking responsibility and actually doing something, he is praising the hospital.

I have heard pediatricians talk about the crisis and talk about how we don't just need beds but we need to have the human resources. We need to have the nurses, the doctors, the people who are in the hospital to support them.

So my question to the member is: What are some of the things that we could have seen in this budget that would have actually helped address our health care crisis?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much for the question.

I think what's really happening at CHEO right now with the Canadian Red Cross coming in—the Canadian Red Cross usually comes in when there is a disaster. They are an emergency option. So it goes back to the disconnect, with the parliamentary assistant saying, “Oh, this isn't a crisis,” and not really acknowledging what's happening in our system.

I think what could have been in this fall economic statement is, the government could have recognized that their vaccination strategy was so poorly rolled out, based on what the Auditor General said in her report—because only 7% of children in the province aged 5 to 6 years received a first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. So the smart money is on prevention. But this government seems really happy with thinking outside the box, by calling in a national health institute to try to pick up the pieces.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Anthony Leardi:** In my riding of Essex, I hear all the time from automotive suppliers and second-tier and third-tier suppliers that they need skilled labour. They need people with the skills that are necessary to produce the products that are in demand, and skilled people are scarce.

In the fall economic statement, we see that the Minister of Labour has successfully included \$45 million for more skilled trades in the province—bringing the total amount to \$140 million of that fund. This is welcome news for the riding of Essex. My question to the member is this: Does she support those measures, and will she vote for them?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'm really glad that the member for Essex raised this issue, because this goes back to the general theme of this government not acknowledging where the problems exist.

People do not want to enter the skilled trades because they don't think it's safe. The coroner's report that just

came out yesterday indicates that our workplaces—well, 41 construction workers have died this year in Ontario. Speaker, 41—some trades, but it doesn't matter that it's not just construction; it matters that 41 people went to work and they didn't come back home again.

If you want to inspire people to enter the skilled trades and not just use your words in this place, then you actually have to put some resources to keep those workplaces safe. That's the missing piece with this government.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** No further questions.

Further debate?

**Mrs. Nina Tangri:** It really is my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to the third reading of Bill 36, our economic outlook. This is our government's progress report on our plan to build Ontario. Also, I will be sharing my time today with the member from Brampton East.

Speaker, the people of Ontario re-elected this government because of our plan, returning a PC government to Queen's Park with an even larger majority than the last Parliament. Ontarians were tired of government inaction. They wanted things to get done—and that's exactly what this plan proposes.

1420

Building on the 2022 budget, the minister's plan recognizes that Ontario, like the rest of the world, will continue to face economic challenges in the months ahead. It includes measures to build our economy, address the province's labour shortage, and keep costs down for families and businesses in my community of Mississauga—Streetsville and right across this province.

Speaker, Ontarians expect their government to invest in infrastructure like highways, bridges, roads and hospitals. Our plan is one of the most ambitious in the province's history, with \$158.8 billion in investments over the next 10 years, including over \$20 billion this year alone. Members of my community will benefit from the single largest hospital infrastructure investment that this province is making—building a brand new, state-of-the-art Mississauga Hospital and expanding the Queensway Health Centre. As former vice-chair of the board of directors of the Credit Valley Hospital in Mississauga, I know how urgently the community needs additional capacity. The new hospital will be almost triple the size of the existing facility—totalling 2.8 million square feet—and will include over 950 beds with 23 operating rooms, an almost 65% increase in OR space compared to the facility today. That is desperately needed by our community, and this government will deliver.

We're also building highways. By investing \$25.1 billion in highway expansion and rehabilitation over the next 10 years, we're connecting communities, fighting gridlock, and keeping goods and people moving across this province.

By building Highway 413, we're supporting the people of Halton, Peel, York and Toronto by relieving the most congested corridor in North America and saving drivers up to 30 minutes on their commute.

We're also investing in transit. A strong transit system is critical to the economic success of our province. That's why we're building projects like the Ontario Line, a 15-stop, 16-kilometre subway line connecting more than 40 other transit lines between the Ontario Science Centre and Ontario Place. And it's why we're investing in GO commuter rail, like the London GO service or the Bowmanville extension—part of our transformation of the GO network into a modern, reliable and fully integrated transit network. Cutting down commute times by increasing service with faster trains, more stations and seamless connections will support communities across the greater Golden Horseshoe and beyond.

Speaker, these investments and projects wouldn't be possible without the hard-working men and women across the province who build them. By investing in skills training and helping businesses attract and retain the best and brightest, Ontario is working for workers to support better jobs and bigger paycheques—a huge thank you to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development for the amazing, immense work he has done, together with this government, to make these initiatives.

In 2021, we expanded access to the Second Career program to people with limited or non-traditional work experience, including gig workers, newcomers and the self-employed, who need training to get a job. To build on these improvements, we're relaunching the program as Better Jobs Ontario, to support a much larger, more diverse range of Ontario workers in a rapidly changing workforce. Building on the nearly \$200 million invested into the program in the last three years, we're providing \$5 million more in new funding to support the expansion of the program and improve access for even more workers.

Today, employment in Ontario hasn't just returned to pre-pandemic levels; it has surpassed it, with 207,000 new jobs being created. Even still, there are 350,000 jobs right across this province currently waiting to be filled. With one in five job openings across the province projecting to be in the skilled trades by 2025, the time to invest in the sector is now. Building the sector means encouraging students to pursue careers in the trades, cutting red tape in the system, and encouraging employer participation.

Last year alone, we eliminated the Ontario College of Trades and established Skilled Trades Ontario, a crown agency created to improve trades training and simplify services. While this was a step in the right direction, we know there's more that needs to be done. That's why we're investing an additional \$114.4 million over the next three years in our skilled trades strategy. Building the province of tomorrow starts today.

We need to ensure we have the health care staff needed to keep up with the massive capital investments our government is making in the health care system, which is why we're also building our health care workforce. We're investing \$142 million, starting this fiscal year, to recruit and retain health care workers in underserved communities. This will start with \$81 million to expand the Community Commitment Program for Nurses—and it has been such a success. Starting in the spring, we're

launching the new \$61-million Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. Up to 2,500 eligible post-secondary students who enrol in priority programs such as nursing will receive upfront funding for tuition, books and other direct educational costs to work in underserved communities in the region where they studied. These programs build on commitments we made during last year's FES to invest \$342 million, adding over 13,000 workers to Ontario's health care system.

We're also investing directly in education. A new investment of \$42.5 million over the next two years will result in an increase of 160 undergrad seats and 295 postgraduate positions over the next five years. Medical schools across Ontario will benefit from this expansion, including the new University of Toronto Scarborough Academy of Medicine and Integrated Health, and the Ryerson school of medicine in Brampton—much needed. These investments will help recruit future health care workers and support improved care across our province.

Our government recognizes that families and businesses are facing financial pressures. A higher-cost province is a less competitive province. Workers may choose to leave Ontario if the cost of living is too high.

By extending the reduced rates of the gas and fuel tax, the government is helping all Ontarians save money by putting an extra 5.7 cents per litre for gas and 5.3 cents per litre for fuel into their pockets.

In April, we eliminated road tolls on Highways 412 and 418, saving up to \$7.50 per trip on Highway 418 and \$3.74 per trip on Highway 412.

By eliminating licence plate renewal fees and stickers, the government is helping save vehicle owners between \$60 and \$120 a year for each passenger and light commercial vehicle.

We're helping Ontarians save money on their everyday expenses.

By lowering fuel taxes, it helps with logistics; it helps getting goods to markets much more efficiently.

All families in Canada should have access to high-quality, affordable, flexible and inclusive early learning and child care. As part of our plan to build Ontario, we will achieve an average of \$10-a-day child care by September 2025, supporting working parents and making life more affordable for families, while also creating more jobs. We also plan to combat increasing demand for child care by creating 86,000 new, high-quality spaces. Licensed child care spaces will include a mix of not-for-profit and for-profit settings to provide families with choice and flexibility.

**1430**

There's so much more to talk about, but I'll wrap up my comments now.

With ongoing economic uncertainty, we're preserving flexibility to respond to unforeseen events and global economic risks while implementing our plan to build Ontario. We're supporting future generations by making investments now to build infrastructure, train workers, and keep life more affordable.

Our government is committed to implementing our plan to build our province and our communities, and I hope we can count on the support from all members across this House.

I'll now turn it over to my colleague for the riding of Brampton East.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Member for Brampton East.

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** I'm honoured to have this chance to rise before this House to discuss the significant progress on our plan to build Ontario. The targeted and responsible measures contained within this bill, the Progress on the Plan to Build Act, will support this progress by helping to build the economy, address the province's labour shortage, and keep costs down for families and businesses. These are the core principles guiding this government—taking action that will directly benefit this province's families, students, seniors, workers and business owners.

In my time today, I want to talk about what we're doing to help the people of Ontario navigate these uncertain times.

Speaker, our government understands that these last few difficult years have brought many new challenges. Everyday goods like groceries and gas now cost more, putting more strain on people's budgets. Businesses of all sizes struggle to find the supplies or the workforce they need to grow, and these shortages can potentially increase the cost of goods sold to consumers. That is why we're remaining steadfast in our commitment to chart a path that is focused on economic growth and prosperity.

We have put forward our plan to help grow the economy by getting shovels in the ground to build critical infrastructure projects and investing in skills training for Ontario workers and newcomers. Our plan also ensures the province is in a position to be ready to manage risk and uncertainty.

Despite these challenges, our government is now projecting a \$12.9-billion deficit in 2022-23, nearly \$7 billion lower than the outlook published in the 2022 budget.

Under this Premier's leadership, we've put forward the right plan to maintain fiscal flexibility so we can support people and businesses today while building for our future.

As I mentioned earlier, this government understands that costs are rising for the people and businesses of Ontario. That's why keeping costs down is one of the key pillars of our plan.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, I have seen first-hand the integral role of the province's transportation network in helping people achieve their goals.

Throughout 2022, our government has implemented changes or new initiatives to give people and businesses more travel options while putting their hard-earned money back into their pockets. In March, we eliminated licence plate sticker renewal fees for eligible vehicles and eliminated double fares for riders connecting to and from GO Transit on most municipal transit systems. And we nearly

doubled Presto discounts for youth and post-secondary students. In April, we removed road tolls on Highways 412 and 418. And last July, we cut gas and diesel fuel tax rates for six months.

The measures within this bill take further action to keep costs down and promote economic growth and prosperity across every corner of our great province.

The last thing the people of Ontario need right now is a tax increase at the pumps. That's why we proposed extending the gas and fuel rates cuts through this bill. This means the tax rate on gasoline and diesel fuel would remain at nine cents per litre until December 21, 2023. Extending these cuts would mean the households of this province would save an average of \$195 between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023.

Speaker, as the finance minister said when he introduced our 2021 fall economic statement, tomorrow's prosperity begins with shovels in the ground today—and that's precisely what we've done. Over this last year, we've made real progress in building the infrastructure that best serves the needs of Ontario's growing population. As I speak, early construction work has started on the Bradford Bypass. We have completed construction at the Union and Rutherford GO stations. And we've broken ground and announced the preferred proponent teams for two key contracts on the Ontario Line.

We've come so far over the past four and a half years despite a decade of underfunding by the previous government. Their inaction left Ontario's roads and highways clogged with gridlock, leaving less time for busy families to spend with their loved ones.

With the population expected to grow about 30% over the next 20 years, the need to address Ontario's massive infrastructure deficit becomes even greater, but today I want to reassure you that our government will not repeat the same mistakes as the one that came before us.

Our government also recognizes that we must address the current labour shortages if we are to build a better future for the people of Ontario. That is why we are focused on supporting job creation and economic growth. Everyone should have a chance to pursue a job that helps them reach their goals, and we want them to know that their government has their back.

That is why one of our key areas of investment is in skills training. Through our Skills Development Fund, we have supported groundbreaking programs that connect job seekers. This funding will help give people the skills and training they need to pursue a new opportunity. As the Minister of Finance announced when he introduced the 2022 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, we're investing an additional \$40 million for the latest round of this program. Speaker, this brings total funding for the next round to \$145 million.

We know that skilled trades present an opportunity for a successful career for thousands of people. High school students need to know that in Ontario today, they can have a great life in the skilled trades or working with children. That is why I'm pleased to share that our government is expanding the Dual Credit Program. This program creates

direct pathways for high school students and learners seeking a career in the trades or early childhood education. It allows students to complete credits towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma and college credential or a Certificate of Apprenticeship, giving them a new opportunity to begin to work earlier. Speaker, there's a future for young people in the trades, and their success is connected to our collective success in building Ontario.

We know the economic road ahead will not be easy, but I am proud to be part of a government that has put forward a plan to maintain fiscal flexibility so we can support people and businesses today while building for the future. The measures I've mentioned, and others within this bill, make clear that our government has created a responsible, flexible plan that Ontario needs to help the people and businesses successfully navigate this period of uncertainty together.

I am confident in the resilience of Ontario's economy, its workers and its people. Together, we will unlock our full economic potential while laying a solid foundation for our future generations to come.

#### REPORT, CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled:

Election Returns with Statistics from the Records (2020 By-Elections and 2022 General Election) from the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario.

#### PROGRESS ON THE PLAN TO BUILD ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2022 LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROGRESSION DU PLAN POUR BÂTIR (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the members from Mississauga–Streetsville and Brampton East for their comments. My question is about the trades themselves. Conservative governments closed shop classes in grades 7 and 8 in the late 1990s. Students in grade 9, often with only two optional classes, don't have the familiarity, and they don't choose the trades as a result.

My question to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville: Will this government invest in education and reopen shop classes in grades 7 and 8?

**Mrs. Nina Tangri:** Thank you to the member for that question. That is such an important question and an important area where we want to make sure that children of all ages, all genders, all parts of this province learn about skilled trades, whichever type of shop class. As we start to build upon the shop classes that we're already reopening, we will slowly get down to the other grades.

I'm really excited about the benefits of bringing employers in and showing them what they would actually

do if they become a skilled tradesperson, a carpenter, an electrician, a welder. We actually went to visit a welding company with the Associate Minister of Housing to see how they could help us—going to schools, teaching them how to do welding, and then eventually show them that this is a great industry to work in. So let's encourage more to do that.

1440

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I thank the speakers for their remarks. A question, perhaps, to the member from Brampton East: One of the things governments often do is have a short-term horizon—you know, just up to the next election or even the next few years. One thing that I think is very important about this government is we have a long-term horizon, particularly with the investment in infrastructure, and whether it's \$25 billion for roads, \$40 billion for health care, \$60 billion for transit, long-term care—the list goes on and on and on.

From a transportation perspective, perhaps you can give your thoughts on the impact that these investments, particularly in infrastructure, are having on your community and a little broader.

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** I'd like to thank the member for that amazing question. Like I just said in my statement, our government is making unprecedented investments across the board, whether it be health care, whether it be transit. Some of the amazing work that we've been doing, is—if we take a look at Scarborough, we're finally getting a subway system that, for years, has been neglected over the previous government, and it is this government that is getting it done. When we look at our transit systems across the province, we're investing in our GO trains, we're investing in municipal transit systems and we're supporting our municipalities through various programs so that their effects during COVID will be offset with our province's support.

We're looking at growing and investing in our transit systems across the province in unprecedented means and taking us to the next level. The infrastructure that the previous government failed to invest in, we're investing in, and we're building Ontario and we're building a stronger future for the residents to come.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**MPP Jill Andrew:** I want to reiterate that the Ontario Line is 75% beyond its budget—above budget. That is a huge, huge, huge deal of money and a huge deal of wasted time with delays that this government is not taking account for.

I understand that the \$8 billion that it will take to finish, hopefully, this Ontario Line project, could have paid for—what is it—seven brand new hospitals. I'm really wondering how much does this government actually care about health care and the human beings that help keep our loved ones safe and well when we have ERs that are bursting at their seams and they're not getting the funding they need for health care? What is happening? What does this government have to say?

**Mrs. Nina Tangri:** I want to thank the member opposite for the question. I think it's critical that we all understand what a challenging time we've had, not just over the past two years. I served for six years on the board of Credit Valley Hospital, from 2006 to 2012, and I saw day in and day out the challenges that they faced, whether it was in the ER—often always clogged up—right through to what's happening on the floor of, and in, the ORs and the struggles that we had to face to find the right human resources for the right positions.

We've had many years, even decades, of a lack of the right type of investments in our health care system. But we're making it right. We're getting it done by making sure that we get more people into nursing, more people as PSWs, so that as we go forward, we don't have to face this crisis—ongoing—forever because it's been an issue for many, many years in the past.

I know the member opposite cares about not just her community but communities across this province. But you know what? This government, this Premier, this Minister of Health and everybody here is making sure we have a lot more people that are qualified. We'll bring more immigrants here. We'll have more people trained. We'll teach them right in the schools that this is a great career.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** The member for Mississauga Centre.

**Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta:** Speaker, nursing is one of the most rewarding careers out there. Despite the rhetoric that's coming from the opposition, which would discourage rather than encourage more students to enrol into nursing, nursing student enrolment has gone up year over year under the leadership of this government.

You know, when I was a nursing student, if there was a program like “learn and grow” that would cover all of my tuition and all of my expenses, who knows? Maybe I would have moved somewhere to a remote and rural community, and maybe I would have fallen in love with that community and stayed there. However, that was not available to me as a nursing student under Kathleen Wynne.

Can the member for Mississauga–Streetsville tell us why historic new programs like “learn and grow” are so important for the recruitment and retention of nurses, especially in far and remote rural communities?

**Mrs. Nina Tangri:** I really want to thank my colleague from Mississauga Centre for the amazing work that she did not just becoming a nurse, but being a nurse throughout the pandemic, as well as serving her constituents.

But she raises a very important issue: Retention, or finding nurses, physicians and other health care workers to be in remote areas or rural areas has been difficult, all the time. Many of them come from those communities, but they have to come to learn about nursing perhaps in the city of Toronto, and many of them don't go back because, as she said, sometimes they will find their partner right here in the GTA. So then they stay here, and then their communities are without those health care professionals they desperately need.

This program is a great way to counter that. Tuition costs, cost of books, costs for accommodation will be

covered by this government, so that we can help retain those nurses in those areas where they so desperately need people, as we're hearing. The members opposite are the ones who are often saying this: Where they don't have the health care professionals, they have to come to the GTA to get the health care needs that they require. We will make that difference. We'll get nurses up there into rural and northern communities, so that they have—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Thank you.

Questions?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** My question is to the member from Brampton East, because he spoke in depth about skilled labour. One of the things we heard from the member from Waterloo, speaking also about skilled labour, was the way we make sure our workers are safe in their workplaces. The fact that we have workers who don't come home—not only are they not safe, but we have workers who have died in their workplaces because we have failed as government, and not just this government; previous governments have failed to do the right thing and make sure our workplaces are safe.

So my question is to the member from Brampton East. How do you think that you can have a complete budget when you're not investing in making sure that workplaces are safe? How is that justified?

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** Thank you to the member opposite for that question. I'd like to start by saying that Ontario has some of the best standards in North America when it comes to labour skills and when it comes to protection and safety of all of our employees, and that our ministry is looking very diligently all the time on how we can improve and better those services.

I'll give you a primary example, Speaker. When delivery drivers during the pandemic were faced with challenges, it was our government that stood beside them and made sure that their rights were protected. So when it comes to bringing in new workers and protecting their rights, that's our government's top priority.

And when it comes to labour skills and training, these corporations who are now asked to bring labour from overseas into this province are faced with numerous amounts of red tape with the federal government. But what this government did was to create a healthy partnership with the federal government, and now we'll be bringing over thousands of people to Ontario through the OINP program on an express process, with support from the Ontario ministry, with the immigration ministry at the federal level. So not only are we bringing—

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Thank you.

Further debate?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It's my honour to rise today to speak in regard to Bill 36. A budget is a statement of values. A budget is also a moral document. A budget outlines the priorities, the principles, the values. It addresses inequities. It provides a road map to the future.

Now, Speaker, if you listen to this government, they would spin it and claim that there is no crisis in hospitals,

that there's no need to be concerned about the greenbelt being auctioned off to the biggest Conservative donors. They claim that their meagre Band-Aids were helping families being crushed under the increasing cost of living, and that they weren't deliberately putting students and education in peril with their cuts and underfunding.

This road map, if you can call it one, does not invest enough in people and public services. This bill does not offer people hope and help. We face unprecedented challenges in the cost of living, housing, health care, education, seniors' care, autism and so many more. But since this was drafted, we've seen very little change. We've seen that they didn't change this. They didn't adjust to the new circumstances.

**1450**

Since this was drafted, children's hospitals are cancelling surgeries. Wait times have ballooned to over 20 hours before you've even been seen. Can you imagine taking a child who is sick and in pain and having to wait almost a day? How do you explain that to that child? How do you make that okay? That's on this government. But worse than that is that it's 20 hours until you've first been seen; that doesn't mean that you are guaranteed a bed after those 20 hours, Speaker.

It's not a surprise, because we warned this government, with their imposition of Bill 124—nurses have worked so incredibly hard throughout the pandemic, and then to be kicked in the teeth again by this government after they kept our families safe—nurses have not had an improvement in their wages in over 10 years.

Despite numerous calls from health care professionals, this government refuses to address the health care human resources crisis that we have across our province. As His Majesty's official opposition, we brought forward a collaborative plan to get Ontario's hospitals back on track, but this government simply does not want to do the work, or they would much rather deliberately sit on their hands as hospitals crumble. This government is not listening to health care workers.

While Bill 36 does provide licensing for internationally educated nurses—something I'm very thankful for, because that's something His Majesty official opposition has been calling for for a number of years—the NDP would also put a stop to privatization, which I believe should be called US-style health theft. We would like to see the bridging programs that are available expanded and compressed so that those who have years of experience in the health care sector may upgrade their skills and enter a new job field.

Ontario's last Minister of Health told the media that private hospitals would help clear the surgery backlog. Our current Minister of Health scratches out parts of her speech where there is a promise not to continue the Liberal privatization of our public health care system.

If you believe this government, they will claim that they're investing. But they're not investing in people. They care about the furniture; they do not care about the people on the front lines. Hospital beds are of no use when there isn't a caring, talented and respected health care worker to provide care.

Bill 36 does not address health care in a way that is responsible, effective or responsive to the struggles of Ontario's public health care sector. This government is doing this on purpose, paving the way for privatization. Privatization means the most important consideration is profit. It's the antithesis of our public health care system, in which the most important consideration is care.

According to the Financial Accountability Office, Ontario will be short \$6.2 billion in health care spending through 2024-25. Yet this government have shown that they're willing to violate the charter. When the Supreme Court tells them that they've made a mistake, that they're guilty of overreaching and undercutting nurses with Bill 124, what do they do? They get ready to launch an appeal. They're going to lose this, likely, yet again, but this Conservative government never gets tired of throwing taxpayer money at losing legal battles—losing legal battles which are based on a flawed, problematic ideology. It's not only fiscally imprudent, but it's an insult. It's an embarrassment. Health care workers deserve our respect. This government has no right claiming they have anything but disregard for health care workers with this routine pattern of treatment.

The Red Cross again having to come to this government's rescue is, quite frankly, unconscionable. I'm glad that there are good people out here who recognize that this is a crisis and they're willing to help. But, Speaker, I'm not quite certain that those who donate to the Red Cross are doing so because this Ontario Conservative government has cut and underfunded hospital care so much. I don't think that the Red Cross should have to use their resources to mitigate a crisis the Ford government has wilfully caused.

It's like the situation with COVID. This government promised an iron ring for seniors, and yet the reality was that the military had to rescue seniors who were malnourished and dying of dehydration, while trays of food scattered across the floors gathered vermin, and people covered in their own urine and feces languished on beds with no sheets, crying out for help—crying out for anyone to help them.

The fact that this government routinely requires panic-mode assistance should make us all wonder why they simply can't seem to get anything right.

Ontario deserves a budget that takes powerful action to end the hospital crisis.

Stop the appeal to Bill 124, lift wages, fix working conditions with a health care human resources strategy, and listen to front-line health care workers, who have great solutions and should be treated like partners by this province.

Re-tabling this tired budget will only make things worse—and making things worse seems to be all according to plan for this government.

When we look at the cost of living, inflation is at an all-time high. Grocery and energy prices continue to escalate, while this government refuses to step in and stand up for families. People are working harder than ever, but the cost of everything is going up, and wages are falling far, far

behind. We see some tinkering around the edges with Bill 36; we see some small band-aids. But band-aids won't stop the bleeding that many families are feeling. Bill 36 does not deliver any relief from inflation whatsoever.

I remember back when our Premier claimed that he would be an 800-pound gorilla—but that comes up as pretty weak and stuffed with fluff.

This bill does nothing to hold to account the corporations that gouge people. Inflation is never an excuse to make money off families who are already struggling. We've seen new words coined, such as "shrinkflation," "greedflation" and others. This should show that this is a crisis across the board. Is it too much to ask this government that they finally do what they've promised and make companies that gouge people accountable?

With wage suppression tactics like Bill 124—we also see Conservative attacks on education workers recently. They used the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as an escape hatch. They have continued their attack on female-dominated professions by trying to impose a contract on education workers.

Further, if we want to look forward to solutions, 28 times His Majesty's official opposition has brought forward legislation for 10 paid sick days—something everyone can agree will help mitigate crises like the COVID-19 pandemic—yet 28 times this government has told workers that they don't deserve it. This Conservative government does not respect workers. When you stay home, others aren't put at risk. Concerns of regular families don't matter to this government. They're disconnected—and by voting that down, they're uncaring.

Another crisis that we are facing right now, which we see many words on but few real concrete actions, is the housing crisis. The dream of owning a home has become yet more unattainable over the last five years because of this government's actions. They play pretend with measures that they call affordable, but then they cut up the environment for their wealthy donors. The reality is, this government cannot hide their love affair with wealthy developers.

This Conservative government cut rent control for buildings that were occupied after November 2018. What did that do for the affordability crisis? What did that do for people who lived in a new place for a year and then found that their rent was going to go up astronomically? Was that affordable? Did that help people? That was on this government. It's completely ridiculous that their excuse at that time would be that that would somehow create more affordable housing. It created a gigantic loophole for people to be exploited by landlords and property owners. It's not more affordable if people's rent can go up without any restraint.

#### 1500

Much of the Conservatives' entitlement shows through in their legislation. We see so much that is pro-developer and against working people.

Furthermore, when we consider the incursions on the greenbelt—the earth is everyone's home, and we cannot

go backwards. People across Ontario are furious that Premier Ford broke his promise about not touching the greenbelt. We've heard them try to excuse this environmental destruction by saying, "This will be affordable housing." Nobody believes this ridiculous, posturing, bait-and-switch nonsense.

If you follow the money, the Narwhal and the Star showed how developers purchased one parcel of greenbelt land for \$100 million—I believe it was in September—at 20% interest, and then the parcel became suddenly developable. It would have been really painful for that developer, at that punishing rate, if the government had not done them a solid by opening up this protected land. What is this government's claim on that score—that this developer made a good guess? I don't think so. This absolutely stinks.

This government could address affordability by actually creating the homes that people need. They could listen to the working people and families who need a safe place to call home by implementing NDP plans to build and deliver new affordable and non-market housing. They could stand up for working families by ending exclusionary zoning. They could protect tenants from gouging and stabilize the market. But instead, they choose to help their wealthy buddies.

Wetlands are interconnected, and they help filter water. They're like the kidneys of the Great Lakes. Conservatives have actually fallen for the line that you can pave over a wetland and make up another one somewhere else. You cannot re-create a wetland with the same rich biodiversity and environmental significance. It's like a chain; if you compromise one of the links, it compromises the entire chain.

Ontario is losing 320 acres of prime farmland every year. Overall, Ontario has lost one fifth of its total farmland.

I call upon this government to listen to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's Home Grown campaign. They said, "We can continue to develop Ontario without paving over our most precious natural resource—fertile farmland." The OFA also pointed out that \$47 billion is contributed to the provincial economy and employs nearly one million Ontarians through skilled labour, trades, technology, innovation and more. Ontario's farmland must be protected. I call upon this government to join the 50,000 people who have signed on.

In terms of health care understaffing, the RNAO has made recommendations which I'd like this government to consider and implement: Stop the appeal of Bill 124 and refrain from extending or imposing future wage-restraint measures; increase the supply of RNs by expediting the process for IENs; increase nursing school enrolments and corresponding funding; compress RPN to bachelor of science in nursing bridging programs; support nursing faculty retention and recruitment; develop and fund a "return to nursing now" program to attract RNs back to the nursing workforce; support nurses throughout their careers by expanding the Nursing Graduate Guarantee program and reinstating the Late Career Nurse Initiative; and

finally, have a task force to make recommendations on matters related to retaining and recruiting RNs.

I met recently with some local nurses in London, and they explained to me that graduates who are sometimes only in the field for two months are becoming the heads of departments. They're also having to mentor students themselves, after two months. It's ridiculous.

Before the pandemic, Ontario was 22,000 RNs short compared to the rest of Canada. This is something that needs action immediately.

My concern, as well, with this government and their decimation of our public health care system is the move towards privatization as being the only option.

When we take a look at the Auditor General's report, private, for-profit in the home care sector has destroyed the sector—it's somewhere where nurses and PSWs make far less, because the care isn't there. It's simply looking at making as much money as possible.

In Bill 36, as well, we see few measures for small businesses that have struggled so much with the disastrous Ontario small business support program that left so many people out in the cold.

Here's a comment from the Toronto Star: "They are always saying that small businesses are the backbone of the economy, so the fact that they did nothing here to help small businesses like restaurants was really surprising."

And then, "'Coming out of the pandemic and into the middle of massive construction products could be lethal for some of our members....'

"Groups including the CFIB and Restaurants Canada had called for the government to either forgive the deferred taxes or let them be paid in instalments."

This government could also take action on the predatory third-party delivery apps that take far too much out of an already lean sector. The margins in restaurants are already so low, and those organizations are, quite frankly, predatory. This government could take action. Will it? That's a good question.

Further, we don't see any solid investments into mental health. There has been historic underfunding in the community-based mental health and addictions sector. I think this government has a lot that they could do.

I'd like to mention, of course, for the record, that the London Health Sciences Centre is currently discussing creating a new emergency room where people who are suffering from a mental health episode can enter in a different location. This is a brilliant plan that's going to be finalized in 2023—in July, I believe—and it's going to cost \$3 billion. But this government is already downloading the cost onto the municipality, onto the city of London. They're asking the city of London to pay \$300 million, and they haven't even seen the plan yet. That is the worst thing.

We don't see any supports for students.

We see very little supports for the justice system.

There are so many more things that I could discuss that this government has not been responsive to, that it has not listened to.



Ultimately this bill, Bill 36, is a statement of values, a statement of morals. It was an opportunity to course-correct. It was an opportunity to address all of the rampant needs and concerns of families and workers across this province, and I would say they have missed the mark.

I think it's important to mention, as well, the Auditor General's report—an absolute bombshell—where it was discussed that \$3.5 billion of the \$7 billion spent on COVID-19-related contracts was for non-competitive procurements. They didn't even try to hide the fact that they were rewarding their friends.

There's so much that needs to be done.

I'd also like to mention that on September 8, the estimates were made available to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. On September 20, I wrote a letter to this government, suggesting that we meet. That letter was never answered. So from September 20 all the way up until the second week in November, the standing committee had never met to publicly look at and consider those estimates. Normally, there are 15 hours of consideration given; we received 20 minutes of questions, total—out of 15 hours, 20 minutes. That's not accountable. That's not transparent. That is a deep concern for the people of Ontario.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to my colleague from London–Fanshawe for his contributions to the debate on the fall economic statement.

I was a little perplexed by his comments around small businesses.

In the fall economic statement, we lay it out very clearly that we are providing \$180 million in income relief over the next three years for small businesses. Many in my riding employ a lot of people, and we're supporting them by phasing out the small business tax rate. I was wondering if the member would support that initiative in the fall economic statement.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member for Perth–Wellington. You may want to correct your record that I'm the member for London North Centre.

1510

Over the pandemic, the opposition NDP brought forward a plan that was endorsed by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. It was the Save Main Street plan. You don't typically think that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce would endorse a plan by the NDP, but they loved it. It was a number of supports to help those struggling small businesses. It took this government about eight months to finally implement many of those measures. By that point, so many people had absolutely lost their shirt—and when you consider how many businesses have their finances tied up into their home, many people lost their entire livelihood.

So I would like to see more supports for small businesses, less corporate help for the large chains, and more consideration for the folks who contribute 80% of our provincial economy.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** The member from Waterloo.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks for the presentation.

I appreciate that the member brought up the importance of skilled trades.

The government has said that they want to pull more skilled trades workers into the sector. However, 41 workers have died this year on work sites, and the Ministry of Labour has just categorically dismissed the 10 recommendations from the coroner's jury on the two workers who died last August in a trench collapse in Ajax, Ontario.

What does the member say to the government about ensuring that we do pull people into the skilled trades, and that connection to workplace safety and feeling supported as workers in Ontario?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member from Waterloo for her comments. She's absolutely right; the trades are something vital and something that we should support, but we also need to make sure that those workplaces are ones that are safe.

I think about a terrible tragedy that happened in London, where there was a partial building collapse, where Henry Harder and John Martens were grievously injured. It was an absolute nightmare for everyone involved.

We see the Ministry of Labour and we see the Minister of Labour talking a great deal, but we don't see enough enforcement. We don't see enough proactive inspections. We don't see them actually standing up for workers. We hear a lot of words about how they claim to support workers, and yet we also see the WSIB—which is routinely ignored, which needs a complete system overhaul. And yet, this government has said it's quite content to allow the status quo, because it benefits them.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Sheref Sabawy:** I would like to thank the member opposite for the debate.

You mentioned WSIB—and I would like to ask: How come you are not supporting this legislation? You know that this government changed the support for persons with disabilities, the people who are on ODSP, increasing the money they get, and they elevated the exemption from \$200 a month to \$1,000, which will put money back into the pockets of those groups of Ontarians who are in bad need of that.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills for his question.

I have unequivocally stated that I am all in favour of the WSIB moving its headquarters to the London location. I am thankful, as well, that this government has finally started some communication, because I know it took them quite some time—we heard many gestures.

The member also mentioned ODSP rates—that is a reasonable gesture for those people who are able to work, but it excludes all the people who cannot. It also excludes all the people who are on Ontario Works. At committee, we heard from an individual who was living on ODSP.

Many are concerned because they have to adjust their family life; they're not able to live with the person they love, based on the fact that they're an ODSP recipient, because family income is used against them in the determination of ODSP. This government had the opportunity to make that change within Bill 36, but they chose not to.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** I was listening very closely to the member from London North Centre, and I always enjoy being in the House. He brings a focus from his constituents and the people from London. It's nice, me being the member from Algoma–Manitoulin, to make the connection in the House as to how similar our issues are, and the one issue I want to talk to him about is exactly that, the ODSP.

It's great that we've seen in this fall economic statement that the government is going to provide the opportunity for those who have the ability to work in sedentary work, other different kinds of work, accommodation work—that they'll be able to increase their income from \$200 to \$1,000 a month without any clawback. However, the vast majority of those who are on ODSP cannot work and have no ability to supplement their incomes.

To the member: What could have been, or what should have been, or where are the priorities of this government for having failed so big on this mark?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for his excellent question. I know from his presentations he's also incredibly connected to his community.

He's absolutely right that this change does not take into account all the people who are on ODSP and the reasons for which they are on ODSP, which is frequently because they are unable to work. We on the official opposition side have stood for doubling the ODSP rate, making sure that it is reasonable and can actually address the cost of living challenges that people have.

The CERB program that was instituted by the federal government determined that everyone should receive \$2,000 per month, and that was a reasonable income for everyone to survive, and yet this government has decided routinely that they would like people who receive ODSP to remain in legislated poverty, because that is the decision they have made. They're keeping people suppressed.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Questions?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I wanted to ask the member if he would expand on some of the things that you felt could have been addressed in Bill 36 that were not. You did mention mental health, and I would agree with you that at a time when we see the need of young people in our schools requiring much, much more mental health supports—I know the \$90 million that the government has put in works out to \$45 dollars a student, and I'm not sure that that's going to go very far when you look at the needs across our school system, in the rising anxiety in young

people and just the stress of not having been in in-class learning consistently for two years.

I just wondered if you could expand on what else you felt the government could have invested in and how to expand more mental health services.

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** There are so many things that the government has missed the mark on. Again, I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough–Guildwood for the question.

I'd like to focus my recommendations on education. If we compare Bill 36, the fall economic statement, to the FAO report, the government is going to be short a billion dollars in education through 2024-25. If we consider the post-secondary sector, Ontario would have to spend 43% more, not to be first but simply not to be last.

The fact of the matter is that, year over year, we've had governments, Liberal and Conservative, that have looked at education as an expense, when it is an investment. The expenditures on post-secondary education don't even cover a third of what is required for post-secondary students.

We know that children in the elementary and high school levels are struggling with mental health. The rates of violence are at an all-time high. We need to have investments now to make sure that people can have their best life.

Further, autism and the Ontario Autism Program never even show up in Bill 36. That is a great cause for concern. We know that the sooner we can get these interventions to children, the better life they will have.

## ESTIMATES

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 62(c), the 2022-23 Estimates of the Office of the Assembly, Office of the Auditor General, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer and Ombudsman Ontario, having been approved by the Board of Internal Economy and tabled earlier today, are deemed to be concurred in.

## PROGRESS ON THE PLAN TO BUILD ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2022 LOI DE 2022 SUR LA PROGRESSION DU PLAN POUR BÂTIR (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Further debate?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** It is always an honour to rise in this Legislature on behalf of the people of my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. When the government tables Bill 36 as part of the update for the fall economic statement, you really do want to see that the government has been moving on budget matters, but also correcting things that it may have missed in the initial budget.

**1520**

I want to start off by saying that doubling GAINS for some of our lowest-income, often vulnerable, seniors is

important. It's important that, in the face of rising inflation, we see a change in their income levels. I would say that that is a good change that was made. But Madam Speaker, this is coming at a time when people across this province are really struggling. They're struggling to climb out of a pandemic, while at the same time being hit with other illnesses like the flu virus, RSV, affecting so many children in this province and putting them at risk and severe danger. We also see soaring inflation rates, and people are struggling. They're struggling to cope with everyday needs. We can see that our health system, for instance, is just really feeling the effects of that. It's buckling. The government's fiscal update does not seem to respond to those needs that we see in our society and for the people across this province.

We were very hopeful and encouraged the government to use it as an opportunity to get rid of Bill 124. It was this finance minister who introduced that and has not made any correction, despite what we're seeing there in terms of the pressures in our health system. We can't keep nurses because they are burnt-out from the pandemic and don't feel very appreciated for their services. We call them heroes, but what are we doing to recognize them with this very oppressive Bill 124? And let's be clear, Madam Speaker: The Ontario Superior Court judge has just struck down Doug Ford's Bill 124 and its wage cap legislation. This is a major blow to this government. I hope that, rather than appealing, they listen to the advice that is coming through loud and clear: that this legislation is damaging; it is exacerbating the staffing shortages that we are seeing and that is overwhelming our health care system.

When you see that hospitals in Ontario have to call in emergency humanitarian assistance from the Red Cross just to attend to the needs of children at CHEO—

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** That was announced this weekend, member opposite, if you weren't paying attention to that.

It was announced this weekend and it is a direct result of the overwhelming need in our children's hospitals, in the ICU, in the critical care units, for those very vulnerable children that we should be protecting. The hospitals are scrambling and they're doing everything they can—but not this government. You're not doing everything that you could be doing, because Bill 124 is an absolutely oppressive bill. In fact, the judge said, "Ontario has not ... explained why it was necessary to infringe on constitutional rights to impose wage constraint at the same time as it was providing tax cuts or licence plate sticker refunds that were more than 10 times larger than the savings obtained from wage restraint measures." This is from the Ontario Superior Court judge.

Speaker, I would urge this government to do all that it can to provide the essential services and systems in this province, like health and education, with the resources that they need.

In September, the Financial Accountability Officer estimated that the government could end up paying \$8.4 billion in back pay and increased wages to unionized and

non-unionized employees affected by this very draconian wage cap in Bill 124.

I also want to just bring to the government's attention—I met with some very, very passionate people in my community who were talking about ODSP and OW. The government did increase ODSP rates by 5%, and this is a step in the right direction—I acknowledge that—but the feedback I have received from these residents in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood is that it is simply not enough for people to survive on in the current reality, in the face of rising inflation, in the face of increased costs in food, which we have seen will be a sustained increase in food costs. We see that core foods like bread and milk are going to remain high, even well into 2023.

I just want to read to you a letter that was written to me. It comes from the Social Assistance Coalition of Scarborough. By the way, Madam Speaker, they wrote to Minister Fullerton about their concerns all the way back in April 2022, so this government has had enough time to consider these very thoughtful recommendations from the Social Assistance Coalition of Scarborough, and they ought to be listening to these residents.

"While there was a 5% increase (just over \$58 more per month) for ODSP recipients, it does not come close to lifting people on ODSP to a livable income, especially with rampant inflation and years of stagnated rates." They noted to me, actually—not what I'm reading right now—that the rates have not increased since 2018, and we know that in 2018 a promised 3% increase was halved by the Ford Conservative government to 1.5%. "Moreover, the rate increase doesn't apply to OW recipients. Many OW recipients are people with disabilities trying to access ODSP and forced to live on \$733 a month, the maximum amount for a single person on OW."

This is something that has been put forward by the Social Assistance Coalition of Scarborough, and I do want to note that this is an important aspect in my community. Food security is at a precarious level in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. In the 2022 Feed Ontario Hunger Report, it reveals that there is skyrocketing food bank use, including a 64% increase in first-time food bank visitors, and I can confirm that in my community we've actually opened new food banks—very sadly, but that's because people are not able to make ends meet. They have to depend on the food bank each and every week for food. When I go to those lines, I see the faces of our students and our young people. I see the faces of our elderly, who have served this country and should live in dignity in their senior years, but they are relying on those food banks. And sadly, I see the faces of our children and our families.

**1530**

And so, the fact that there is this food insecurity in our system right now, rising inflation, heavy cost of food—and at a time when the government is actually paving over farmland, right? Because Bill 23—we've been talking about that in this Legislature. Instead of investing and making people feel more food-secure, this government is busy paving over farmland by selling off the greenbelt to their developer friends. It's just the wrong focus at a time

when we need to do better, and I would urge the government to back down from Bill 23. It's a wrong-headed move, a wrong decision.

The people of Ontario are saying that. In my community of Scarborough–Guildwood, which is located on the shores of Lake Ontario, right on the Scarborough Bluffs, we are sensitive to what happens in those wetlands, because what happens there is that it flows right down through my community and into the lake. So I am very concerned.

Yes, housing is at a crisis. We need more affordable housing. This government should be focused on that instead of looking at greenbelt land and those big monster homes. That is not going to solve the housing crisis, I can tell you that.

The one thing I also want to say as I close out is that extending the gas tax for cities is important. It's important because they use those resources for public transit. In my community in Scarborough–Guildwood, we rely on that. I know that TTCriders has come to me. They would like to see an increase in funding to maintain the existing system so that it can operate at full capacity to serve the need, as well as new investments in things like the Eglinton East LRT. So it's very important that we look at those new transit projects and extend those services and those supports to communities like mine in Scarborough that we need to continue to invest in.

Thank you so much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to debate Bill 36 today.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** I'm newer in the House, but when I came to the Legislature, I used to think with regard to the Liberal Party that there wasn't a regulation they didn't want to duplicate, a program spend they didn't want to double or a tax they didn't want to increase. Since my time in the Legislature, I'm willing to revise my opinion. We hear members of the Liberal Party speak more about cost-of-living issues, more about inflation, about putting money back into people's pockets.

One of the great things that this bill does is extend that gas tax cut, which not only makes life more affordable for commuters like myself who drive into work but also helps with food prices and other things. Knowing the economic times that we're in, is the member willing to adjust her approach, support our gas tax and join us in calling on the federal government to scrap the ineffective carbon tax?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Madam Speaker, unlike the member from the government side here, who I actually—you know, Brampton North is where my family lives.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** They voted for him.

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I can't speak to who they voted for, member opposite, but what I can say is that they're looking for a government that not only thinks short term, not only thinks about cutting the gas tax in the short term—I can understand it's a short-term measure for affordability when we have high inflation. But in the long term, we have to think about our environment. We have to think about climate change.

My nephew who lives in that same community is going to be two years old on Saturday, and I want to wish him a happy birthday. Jordan, as you celebrate your second birthday—I want to make sure that there's a future that's vibrant and a healthy planet for Jordan and for all future generations for years to come.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** Madam Speaker, through you, a quick question to the member for Scarborough–Guildwood related to what is not in this bill: It seems that this is a bill that has nothing to do with stopping gouging with the cost of food and groceries and grocery stores that are owned by billionaires. This impacts every member in our community, including seniors and people on fixed incomes. My question to you is, why do you think none of these important issues for the province of Ontario are being tackled with this piece of legislation?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you so much for the opportunity to address what I think is a major flaw in the fall economic statement. The government definitely has not helped individuals with the huge burden they face right now with the skyrocketing inflation and in terms of food security; I mentioned that. Instead, the government has put a lid on reserves. The budget had a \$4.5-billion reserve provision, and at the update of the fall economic statement, which was the second-quarter statement that the FAO reviewed—it was at \$4.2 billion in reserves still sitting there, when there are so many needs in this province that could be addressed, as you mentioned.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough–Guildwood for her comments, and especially for pointing out all of the billions sitting in contingency funds.

My question, though, is, what comparisons could the member make between the Conservatives' Bill 124 and the Liberals' infamous Bill 115?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Well, the member should know that there's no comparison at all.

Bill 124 has been an oppressive wage-constraining bill. When you think about who is in the public service, it's really a lot of female-dominated professions that have been suffering under this. We see the nurses have risen up to say they oppose this bill.

Bill 115, which was put in place to have teachers come back after a situation where they were on strike, has already been litigated in the courts. There has already been a settlement to acknowledge that that was something that should not have happened.

The jury is still out when it comes to Bill 124. The FAO has estimated it could cost Ontario \$8.4 billion, for this wage-suppressing legislation.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** I want to thank the member for her thoughtful answer to my earlier questions.

This question is more about the good people of Scarborough.

We've seen, time and time again, over 15 years, that the people of Scarborough were neglected by previous governments.

One of the key things that I know the member for Scarborough–Agincourt, the member for Scarborough–Rouge Park and the member for Scarborough North have really pushed for is to increase provincial investments locally.

This document, our fall economic statement, gives a progress update on investments like the Scarborough medical school with U of T, the expansion of the Scarborough hospital, and the Scarborough subway stops. When the member had a chance to review the document and saw the progress, did the member regret voting against all of those investments?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I really want to thank the member from Brampton North, because it gives me a chance to talk about my nine years in this Legislature.

Supporting the expansion of the Scarborough Health Network is something that our former government did—\$1.1 billion was put into treasury when I was part of that cabinet, because we knew that Scarborough needed a new hospital. The fact that this government has sat on it—it has now grown to \$1.5 billion. We need to get shovels in the ground on that project as quickly as possible, because the money has been sitting there for definitely the four and a half years that you guys have been in government.

In terms of the medical school, that was an idea I helped to conceive of. I'm really, really thrilled that we will have the Scarborough medical academy opening in 2025, with medical students who will be living and learning in Scarborough.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Further questions?

**Mr. Graham McGregor:** I appreciate that the member is joining us in supporting the creation of the medical school in Scarborough with U of T, but I didn't hear why the member voted against it in the first place.

Could the member expand a little bit more on why she voted against the medical school in Scarborough?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** Thank you for the opportunity to continue to inform the member that I was one of the people who conceived of the idea of having a medical school in Scarborough, and I am thrilled to see that that school—it's less than when we were in government. We proposed 70 doctoral seats; I believe the government today is funding 50, but that's okay. While it's not the 70 that was initially proposed, 50 is a good start, and I believe that it's going to make a difference. In Scarborough, we lack primary health care physicians, and having a med school there is going to encourage residency at the Scarborough Health Network. People could choose to even live and raise their family in our community because of this medical school. So it's a wonderful thing for Scarborough.

1540

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Further questions?

**Hon. David Piccini:** Working for the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada for a number of years was really one of the impetuses to run—and I'm curious, heralding the vision that you'd had, why wasn't that put into action when the previous government cut residency positions? I'm very glad that you're supporting this, but I think we have to be open and honest with ourselves. When we had 15 years to do it—cut residency positions in Ontario. This government is expanding it. Do you support it?

**Ms. Mitzie Hunter:** I'm the former minister of universities and colleges and trades. Our previous government opened the Northern Ontario School of Medicine because we wanted to have more doctors in the north. When I was in government—supporting the expansion of the medical school into Scarborough was something that I noticed as a gap. I helped to support a proposal which later came into fruition under your government. I think that's a good example of what works—that you start something and it carries on and it's sustained. So I'm very, very proud of the work in my local community and of the work that we did when I was the minister responsible.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Further debate? The member from Perth–Wellington.

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you, Speaker. I will also be sharing my time with the great member from Niagara West, who gave me a resounding round of applause there, as well.

It's my honour to rise today to speak to some of the critical investments our government is making under our fall economic statement. Whether it's our plan to build, expanding our investments in the skilled trades, or being there for our most vulnerable, our government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is taking historic steps to ensure Ontario is kept on the right path.

Speaker, let's not forget it was just over four years ago that Ontario was holding on by a thread. Thousands of manufacturing jobs were being lost, hydro rates were skyrocketing, and Ontarians were losing hope. Since then, our government has pushed forward with the real priorities of Ontarians, standing strong throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and now taking the necessary steps to recover and grow.

Our progress report on our budget measures highlights our resolve and determination to get things done for Ontarians on all fronts.

Ontario is not the only jurisdiction facing labour shortages, a housing crisis and cost-of-living strains, but our government is making every effort to ensure that we're among the first to overcome these challenges through a variety of tax relief initiatives, infrastructure investments and digital innovations.

First and foremost, our government understands and values and respects the needs of our taxpayers. We are managing the provincial debt in a responsible and respectful manner. Just this past September, our government announced the deficit for the 2021-22 fiscal year had been eliminated, and while it may not always be the case going

forward with each passing year, our government will always remain steadfast as we look to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are spent wisely.

Our plan to build hinges on the connectivity of people, communities and businesses across Ontario. Our government's plan highlights \$25 billion over the next decade to support planning and construction of highways and rehabilitation projects like Highway 413, the Bradford Bypass, the QEW Garden City Skyway and many others—including in my own riding of Perth–Wellington, \$1.4 million for Highway 89 in Mount Forest and \$1.3 million on Ontario Street in Stratford. And I want to apologize to my constituents—there's a joke that there are two seasons in Ontario, construction season and winter, and it really felt this way in my riding this summer. But it's great to see the provincial government making these investments, as outlined in the fall economic statement.

Beyond this, our government is allocating \$61 billion over the next 10 years towards public transit, connecting people across a variety of different communities and allowing them to engage in broader local, regional and provincial economies. More specifically, this will support even larger-scale transit projects such as the Ontario Line to the Ontario Science Centre, connecting over 40 transit hubs including GO train lines, TTC lines and the Eglinton Crosstown light-rail transit line, and including, through the Community Transportation Grant Program system under Minister Mulroney, transportation in my riding of Perth–Wellington. We are including transportation in rural Ontario, which is something that unfortunately has been lost in previous governments in this place. These transit funds will also support GO train expansion outside of the GTA—nothing against my great GTA colleagues, but we do need to expand the GO train beyond the greater Golden Horseshoe, to communities such as Stratford and St. Marys. These investments will reduce emissions, cut commuting times, and allow families to spend more time together.

Speaker, the opposition never wastes an opportunity to call for more transit investments, which is why I'm calling on all opposition MPPs here today to join our government in advancing this important shared priority, and to show that they're really fighting for their constituents and not just counting political points.

However, with or without our opposition colleagues, our government is fully aware of what Ontarians are looking for from us. We heard it loud and clear this past June, when people right across the province gave this government a mandate to build more infrastructure, invest in our health care and schools, and keep costs down for families and businesses.

Our government has committed more than \$40 billion over the next 10 years in hospital infrastructure, supporting more than 50 additional major hospital projects—a historic investment—and community health care centres, adding 3,000 new beds over that time period.

And in light of the financial pressures on families and businesses across the province that they have been facing over the last few years, our government is making sure that

we take every step to ensure families can live comfortably and businesses can thrive.

In spring 2022, recognizing the effects of inflation and geopolitical circumstances, our government cut the provincial gas tax by 5.7 cents per litre. Statistics Canada has shown that this cut has contributed significantly to the decline in gas prices across Ontario and has helped lower the consumer price index. We're proposing, under the fall economic statement, to extend that to the end of 2023.

Furthermore, our government has continued to take leadership in streamlining business operations and reducing costs for complying with regulations, saving businesses, not-for-profits, municipalities, universities, colleges, hospitals and school boards \$576 million per year. The integrated impacts of these cost-saving measures are reflected by an increase in total real business investment in Ontario by \$9.7 billion between the second quarter of 2018 to the second quarter of 2022. More than just that, our government has overseen a 5.2% increase over the same time period in investments by Ontario businesses in real intellectual property rights, ranking the highest in the nation for the portion of small and medium enterprises reporting ownership of IP.

Speaker, when we look back at where we were as a province just four and a half years ago, it's amazing to see how well this government has been able to turn around our economy, while steering us through such unprecedented times. All of these indicators reflect the important strategic advantages our government is putting in place for businesses across the province, across a variety of sectors, to succeed not only on a regional and national level, but on an international level. Our government has full faith that we as a government are willing and able to create the right business environment, with a balance of market freedoms and regulations, and Ontario businesses will thrive. That is precisely what this progress report indicates.

Expanding on this, our government's plan to build will naturally support the expansion of skilled trades throughout this province, further promoting lucrative and fulfilling job opportunities for young Ontarians. We have lifted the minimum wage, invested in dual-credit programs and expanded the Skills Development Fund. Our government has made significant strides in addressing our labour shortage, ensuring that Ontarians can play an important role in the growth and development of our great province.

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As outlined in the fall economic statement, we are investing an additional \$40 million in 2022-23 for a total of \$145 million for the latest round of the Skills Development Fund. I know many organizations in my riding take advantage of this. The Technical Training Group, for example, does amazing work to encourage young people and people who have also gone on to post-secondary but want to get into the trades, which is very key. There are thousands and thousands of jobs in the skilled trades, and we need people to join us in building Ontario, and this investment will do just that.

We're also investing—which I am personally very excited about—an additional \$4.8 million in the Dual Credit Program. We have heard over and over that we need more ECEs in our province, and this investment will help us expand that over the next two years and will help us realize a \$10-a-day child care agreement which we signed with the federal government earlier this year.

Speaker, we're constantly looking to improve and expand opportunities for all Ontarians, and we're also ensuring no one gets left behind. Whether it's low-income workers and families, individuals with disabilities, or seniors who have given so much to our communities, our government has made it clear that we will continue to support these groups as we grow Ontario for everyone. And in doing so, our government is making significant investments and changes to allow persons with disabilities on the ODSP program to keep more of their money, further increasing the monthly exemptions from \$200 per month to \$1,000 per month. These proposed changes will allow approximately 25,000 individuals currently in the workforce to keep more of their earnings and encourage as many as 25,000 more individuals to participate in the workforce, which is vitally needed. Since proposing these changes, we've heard from numerous partners in the non-profit sector applauding these changes and the positive outcomes this will create for Ontarians. I think it shows our government's compassionate leadership in being willing to grow our economy but to also support those who are most vulnerable in society.

With that, Speaker, I want to pass it over to my great colleague from Niagara West.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** The member from Niagara West.

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** I listened with great intent to the member for Perth–Wellington as he laid out some of the incredible investments that Premier Ford and this government are making in communities across Ontario. Frankly, I know communities like his, in parts of rural Ontario, for many years, were neglected by the previous Liberal government, propped up by the NDP.

In my riding of Niagara West, we had a bit of a similar experience. I know that prior to this government coming to office in 2018, we saw the abandonment of rural communities, such as Wainfleet, Grimsby, Fenwick, West Lincoln and Lincoln, that for so long had consisted of people who worked hard and got up every morning to contribute and raise their families, to be able to build stronger communities, and who just wanted a government that worked for them and heard what their needs were and responded to those needs. Unfortunately, they hadn't seen that for many years. That changed in 2018, when our government came to office, building investments in our communities, from rural broadband access to natural gas expansions to the new hospitals in every corner of the region to expansions in mental health, and, of course, jobs—making sure that manufacturing that had been leaving Niagara once again returned because of the billions of dollars in savings through tax cuts, through reducing the cost of skyrocketing hydro rates which we'd

seen under the former government and, of course, red tape measures which are so important to ensure that businesses are able to move forward without duplication and unnecessary regulation.

Earlier this year, in the lead-up to the June election, when I went out and spoke with people in my constituency about the investments they saw, the people in my riding were thrilled. They were excited to see that a government was listening to them. There was a government in Toronto that understood—with great respect to my colleagues from the rest of the GTA—that the world didn't end at the Burlington Skyway, that the world was beyond the GTA stretch of this province. Rural communities, for the first time in many years, were being heard, were being listened to, and were being invested in.

I think as a result of those types of actions, we saw a strong mandate return to this House, with my colleagues from every corner of Ontario—they were able to return and continue the work we started.

Today's legislation that we're debating, the Progress on the Plan to Build Act, builds on, really, the commitments and the themes that I heard front and centre from my constituents over the course of the spring conversations. I had a wonderful opportunity to speak with people from every background when I was out door-knocking. It's one of the best parts, I believe, of our work as elected representatives: to go out, to pound the pavement, to hear from the people, the everyday folks who are working hard to raise their families and build up our communities, about what their concerns were.

I heard some really key themes come through. I heard about the need to ensure that we were rebuilding our economy after the challenges of COVID. I heard about the need to have a government that worked for workers—that recognized the increased cost of living and was working to ensure that everyone had the skills they needed to succeed and thrive today and tomorrow, with the jobs that not just currently exist but those that are coming, with investments in things like the electric vehicle manufacturing space and in so many other areas.

I heard the theme that came through constantly about the need to address the cost of living, and people were very pleased to see that our government had taken action to cut the licence plate sticker fees and, of course, to cut the gas tax.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** Absolutely. And, again, those were measures that the government took in direct response to the needs of the people in our communities—in rural communities, in urban communities, in suburban communities, and the north and in the south.

We also heard about that need to build highways, to ensure that key infrastructure in every part of this growing province was reflecting that growth and that those investments were going to be made.

We saw also this spring a clear message from Ontarians that they wanted to see Ontario kept open, and I think that on June 2, we saw an overwhelming endorsement of our response to the themes that people brought to us. I really

believe that that's what led to our success in the spring and it's the work that we are now continuing in this fall economic statement.

The budget is a really, really important document. It's one that lays out the priorities that the government has, and it's one that ensures that the people of Ontario understand how their government is being responsible and good fiscal managers, ensuring that they're not passing on the costs of today's services to future generations, but are acting in a responsible manner. And I believe that that's a budget that we passed earlier this year that demonstrated those commitments.

But in between budgets, which come around once a year, we have the opportunity to table an update, to provide a progress report to our constituents, who, of course, are interested in knowing what we're doing here, working on their behalf. And one of the really, really important ways that we can do so is through this document, through the Plan to Build and the Progress on the Plan to Build Act. At that time, we also have the opportunity, as we've done in this legislation, to build on the commitments that are made in the budget.

So I think some of the measures in this document that are so important are really ones that continue on those themes that I spoke about, that we heard from our constituents, themes around ensuring that we have a strong economy. And so, taking place in this legislation are measures such as providing Ontario's small businesses with \$185 million in income tax relief over the next three years, benefiting over 5,500 small businesses through the extension of the phaseout of the small business tax rate, building on previous work that had been done in this way; and automatically matching property tax reductions for small businesses within all municipalities which adopt the small business property subclass, an important way for small businesses to save money and to reinvest in their businesses to hire more people and to grow our economy.

But also, Speaker, one of the things I heard from my community was the need to ensure that governments are compassionate. And that's why I'm so proud to see that our government is making a change to ensure that those who are on ODSP not only get a 5% increase across the board, but also will have that support program that really helps some of the most vulnerable in our society, with a program that's indexed to inflation, recognizing the changing needs of an uncertain economy.

But something that I believe is also really important and something that I heard from constituents time and time again was the change to allowable earnings and to be able to see that go from \$200—not to \$500, not to \$600, not to \$700, but to \$1,000 a month before any clawbacks begin. I believe it's something that the Minister of Finance and the Premier have demonstrated exceptional leadership in, and I want to thank them on behalf of the people of my community.

*Interjections.*

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** Absolutely.

Speaker, we've also seen, unfortunately, that for many years, the previous government ignored the needs of

skilled trades workers. But that, under this government, is changing. That's something we sent a clear signal to in some of the very first actions that we took when we came to office, recognizing that people, no matter what their work is, are doing valuable work, are doing work that adds to their dignity and that is worthy of recognition. An area that, unfortunately, had been overlooked for many years was the area of skilled trades. So this legislation builds on the important work that the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development had done in this space, and it invests an additional \$40 million in the upcoming fiscal year, for a total of \$145 million, through the Skills Development Fund, helping to train tens of thousands of people across this province in those crucial skills, which is also helping to build the capacity to make these investments in infrastructure that we are making.

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I think again of my riding of Niagara and the three new hospitals that are being built, the dozens of new roads and new bridges that are being redone, the incredible investments in broadband and in natural gas that are happening. It takes a lot of people to make this work happen. Unfortunately, we didn't see, under the previous Liberal government propped up by the NDP, investments into the types of skilled training that would make sure we had the workforce to make these investments. You would hear big plans, perhaps, sometimes from the opposition or the Liberals. They wanted to strike another committee, issue another report about their plans, but they didn't do the real work that needed to happen to make the investments that we are now making.

I want to thank the Minister of Finance for including this important point in our fall economic statement.

I spoke about the importance that the people of my riding brought to cost savings when it comes to the gas pump. When we came to office, we fought the federal government, and have continued to fight all the way to the Supreme Court, on the carbon tax. But the Minister of Finance built on that work by announcing that our gas tax cut that we put in place earlier this year is being extended for a whole other year, saving people in the province of Ontario hundreds of dollars when they gas up at the pump.

Speaker, as I wrap up, I want to thank my colleagues for the work they're doing in this House to ensure that the voices of their constituents are being reflected in the legislation that comes forward. At the end of the day, it's important that each and every one of us takes those ideas and ensures that they're reflected in the government's priorities, and I believe that the fall economic statement does that. It builds on the work that we announced in our budget, and we'll continue to do that work to ensure each and every one of our communities is supported.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutila Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Michael Mantha:** I really enjoyed the comments the member from Niagara West offered this evening. He's quite articulate. I always enjoy being in the House listening to him, and I'm glad that he touched on the ODSP rates.



My question to him is—as the member from Algoma–Manitoulin, I always try to bring to the floor the questions of people across my riding, and today’s question that I’d like to put to you is on behalf of Donna Behnke. She’s in Elliot Lake and she actually texted me a question this morning. She says, “Listen, Mike, I’m on ODSP. I do not have kids so I have not been benefitting from any of the surpluses that have been provided to individuals and families on ODSP.” And she’s quite happy that they were successful in that. She says, “I cannot work, just like many people on ODSP who cannot work. How is it that this fall economic statement is going to be benefitting me, because I can’t go out and work to supplement my income to what the government has done to \$1,000?”

What can we tell this constituent of mine as far as, what is this government going to do to help her?

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** Thank you to the member opposite for bringing forward the feedback you’re hearing from constituents and their questions. I would say to your constituent, and as I’ve spoken with my constituents about these issues, it’s the importance of cumulative changes and ensuring that our government is taking actions in a number of different areas to make life more affordable. That gas tax cut has an impact on the cost of food, on the cost of transportation and also on the ability of your constituent and my constituent to be able to get from A to B in a reasonable time frame. So whether it’s the gas tax cut, whether it’s also fighting the increases that we saw under the ideological Fair Hydro Plan, as it was called—but really the unfair hydro plan—of the former government and the changes that we’ve made to stabilize hydro rates to ensure that someone like your constituent is able to see a reasonable hydro bill as opposed to a very high hydro bill—and also taking action to build more housing, to ensure that rent rates are stabilized in order to ensure that there are more savings that are put in the pocket of your constituent.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Vincent Ke:** Thank you to my colleague for his wonderful presentation. Speaker, in their remarks, they have mentioned that the government continues to have grown the economy by getting shovels in the ground to build key infrastructure projects, such as subways, hospitals, GO trains, roads and bridges etc. and investing in skills training for Ontario’s workers and newcomers. We know that Ontario is facing labour shortage challenges now. Could the member from Niagara West or Perth–Wellington tell us about how this legislation will support the government’s efforts to address the labour shortage in Ontario?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to my honourable colleague for that great question, and to rise and talk about some of the initiatives. Just so the House is aware, my riding, the catchment area, has the lowest unemployment rate in Ontario—2.6%, I believe, was the last statistic. So if you know anyone who needs a job, please tell them to come to my riding. If you can walk and talk and show up

on time, they will give you a job and they will train you. It can be a variety of jobs.

Our government, obviously, is hearing this from businesses across Ontario, and so the investments in the Skills Development Fund, the \$40 million extra in that, I think demonstrates our government’s commitment to going above and beyond to meet that demand and continue to build Ontario and working with our federal colleagues, as has been alluded to earlier today in this House, to get more new Canadians to come to Ontario and have a bigger say over the provincial nomination program.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam:** Thank you very much to the members for their presentation. I think we can all agree that homelessness has reached a humanitarian disaster, especially in the province of Ontario. We’re seeing encampments grow in big cities as well as small communities and communities of in-between sizes.

And yet we know that the housing crisis that the government has spoken about is going to be addressed through some of their measures, but I believe that the housing crisis that largely remains unaddressed is the affordable housing crisis, so therefore, those who can afford less than the \$2,000 average rent that we’re seeing in some areas. I’m curious to know, why is the government cutting \$85 million from the homelessness program compared to what they spent last year?

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** Well, I find it shocking to hear the member opposite stand in this House after voting against Bill 23, a plan to build more housing for people in her riding, in my riding and all of our ridings, and claim that she’s focused on solutions to the housing crisis. It doesn’t make any sense. You can’t say on the one hand that you care about ensuring there is more housing and more affordable housing for people in this province, and on the other hand, vote against legislation that will actually make that happen.

We know that we need 1.5 million homes in the province of Ontario. We know that the status quo wasn’t making that happen. And when our government took action to make the changes, to make it happen, she voted against it. My question to her would be, how can you vote against legislation that would have solved the housing crisis?

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mr. Rob Flack:** I certainly enjoyed the member from Niagara West’s comments because I think our ridings share—and Perth—

**Interjection:** Wellington.

**Mr. Rob Flack:** —Wellington—where we share a great mix of urban and rural constituents. The one thing in my former life that I always said that we always did was belly-to-belly listening. And if I’ve learned anything since I have come to this House, it’s that we have to keep doing that. What I’m hearing from my constituents is they’re worried about the economic uncertainty, they’re worried

about costs and government spending, and they're worried about infrastructure.

So my question to the member is simply, what priorities in this legislation tackle the cost of government while investing in infrastructure, roads, hospitals, education etc. to make this province a better place?

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** Thank you to the member. I think we share a lot of concern about this issue because something that we, as Conservatives, understand intrinsically is the importance of having governments that operate with value for money, and that they are ensuring that the investments that, frankly, taxpayers, at the end of the day, are putting on the line as those who are paying for the services—they want to see a good return for that.

That's where I think the big contrast between what we saw under the former Liberal government—again, propped up by the NDP for many, many years—was where they spent billions and billions and billions of dollars, and at the end of it, what did we have to show for it? As the Minister of Finance has said, we had a health care system that was in crisis. We didn't have long-term-care homes built in the province of Ontario. We didn't have new hospitals. We didn't have new roads.

And that's, I think, a fundamental difference under this government. Our government is ensuring that each and every dollar that's being spent for the taxpayers of this province is going into ensuring we have good infrastructure that is focused on economic recovery and jobs for today and tomorrow.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** Questions?

**Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens:** A quick question related to what is not in this bill: that is, a clear path to

support nurses and front-line health care workers who are feeling burned out, a clear path to support hospitals that want to retain this important staff.

Earlier today my questions were ignored when I asked about supporting nurses, front-line staff and patients. The fact is that the FAO, the Financial Accountability Officer of the government of Ontario, reports that you are imposing a giant inflationary cut on our health care services.

So my question is, failed policies like these are making the crisis worse. Do you believe that Bill 124 has made hiring and retaining nurses harder for hospitals in Niagara, and will you amend this or any legislation to repeal it?

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** I thank my colleague for that question. It's a great opportunity to rise and talk about some of the initiatives we are doing for Niagara West, but also Perth-Wellington and our rural communities.

The learn and stay grant, which we announced earlier this year, is making a significant impact in our rural hospitals. It's attracting nurses and health care workers to our hospitals. In rural Ontario, prior to the COVID pandemic—it's hard to think of way back then, prior to 2020, in March. But in my area where I'm from, and I'm sure similar to Niagara West, I'm assuming, there was already a shortage of health care workers because it was hard to attract and retain health care workers.

Our government is doing our best to address that issue through the learn and stay grant, encouraging people and providing money for them to pay for their tuition, to relocate to those communities and to work in our rural hospitals.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bhutla Karpoche):** There's no more time for questions.

*Report continues in volume B.*





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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	
<b>Skelly, Donna (PC)</b>	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-présidente et présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)</b>	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
<b>Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)</b>	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	
<b>Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)</b>	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
<b>Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)</b>	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
<b>Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)</b>	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

<b>Member and Party / Député(e) et parti</b>	<b>Constituency / Circonscription</b>	<b>Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités</b>
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
<b>Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)</b>	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	