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Jeudi
30 mars 2023

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Clerk: Todd Decker

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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 30 March 2023 / Jeudi 30 mars 2023

Withdrawal of Bill 89

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)3235

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Working for Workers Act, 2023, Bill 79, Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2023 visant à oeuvrer pour les travailleurs, projet de loi 79, M. McNaughton

Mr. Wayne Gates 3235
MPP Jamie West 3235
Mr. Todd J. McCarthy..... 3235
Mme France Gélinas 3236
Second reading vote deferred..... 3236

2023 Ontario budget

Ms. Catherine Fife..... 3236
Mr. John Vanthof..... 3241
Mr. Todd J. McCarthy..... 3243
Debate deemed adjourned..... 3244

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉES ET DÉPUTÉS

Canadian Cancer Society's daffodil campaign

Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy 3244

Autism treatment

Ms. Peggy Sattler 3244

Festival of the Maples

Mr. John Jordan..... 3244

Affaires francophones

MPP Lise Vaugois..... 3244

2023 Ontario budget

Mr. Logan Kanapathi 3245

Marcel Charron

MPP Jamie West 3245

Palliative care

Ms. Jess Dixon 3245

Community services

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady 3245

Rajasthan Association of North America

Mr. Deepak Anand..... 3246

World Autism Awareness Day

Mr. Ric Bresee 3246

Report, Chief Electoral Officer

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott) 3246

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEUSES ET VISITEURS

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy..... 3246
Miss Monique Taylor 3246
Ms. Laurie Scott 3246
Mme France Gélinas 3246
Mme Dawn Gallagher Murphy 3247
Mr. Peter Tabuns 3247
Mr. Deepak Anand 3247

QUESTION PERIOD / PÉRIODE DE QUESTIONS

Cost of living

Ms. Marit Stiles 3247
Hon. Paul Calandra 3247

Health care

Ms. Marit Stiles 3248
Mrs. Robin Martin..... 3248

Services for seniors and persons with disabilities

Ms. Chandra Pasma..... 3249
Hon. Paul Calandra 3249

Education funding

Ms. Andrea Khanjin 3249
Hon. Stephen Lecce..... 3250

Missing persons

Miss Monique Taylor 3250
Hon. Paul Calandra 3250

Skilled trades

Mr. Billy Pang..... 3251
Hon. Monte McNaughton 3251

Homelessness

Ms. Sarah Jama 3251
Hon. Steve Clark 3252
Hon. Nina Tangri 3252

Cost of living

Mr. John Fraser 3252
Mr. Rick Byers 3252
Hon. Paul Calandra 3253

Protection for workers

Ms. Laurie Scott 3253
Hon. Monte McNaughton 3253

Home care

Ms. Peggy Sattler 3253
Mrs. Robin Martin..... 3254

Mental health and addiction services

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff	3254
Hon. Michael A. Tibollo	3254

Public transit

Ms. Doly Begum	3255
Hon. Caroline Mulroney	3255

Veterinary services

Mr. Mike Harris	3255
Hon. Lisa M. Thompson	3256

Noise pollution

Mr. Peter Tabuns	3256
Hon. Caroline Mulroney	3256

Women's services

Ms. Christine Hogarth	3257
Hon. Charmaine A. Williams	3257

Visitors

Hon. Nina Tangri	3258
------------------------	------

Business of the House

Hon. Paul Calandra	3258
--------------------------	------

Doctors' Day

Mr. Adil Shamji	3258
-----------------------	------

Notice of dissatisfaction

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	3258
-------------------------------------	------

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

**Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures),
2023, Bill 85, Mr. Bethlenfalvy / Loi de 2023 visant
à bâtir un Ontario fort (mesures budgétaires),
projet de loi 85, M. Bethlenfalvy**

Second reading agreed to	3259
--------------------------------	------

**Fewer Floods, Safer Ontario Act, 2023, Bill 56,
Ms. McMahon / Loi de 2023 visant à réduire les
inondations et accroître la sécurité en Ontario,
projet de loi 56, Mme McMahon**

Second reading negated	3260
------------------------------	------

Working for Workers Act, 2023, Bill 79,

**Mr. McNaughton / Loi de 2023 visant à oeuvrer
pour les travailleurs, projet de loi 79,
M. McNaughton**

Second reading agreed to	3260
--------------------------------	------

Visitors

Hon. Nina Tangri	3260
Hon. David Piccini	3260

**REPORTS BY COMMITTEES /
RAPPORTS DE COMITÉS****Standing Committee on Government Agencies**

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott)	3261
Report deemed adopted	3261

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

**Anti-Scab Labour Act, 2023, Bill 90, Ms. French;
Mme Gélinas; Mrs. Gretzky; MPP West / Loi de
2023 sur les briseurs de grève, projet de loi 90,
Mme French; Mme Gélinas; Mme Gretzky;
MPP West**

First reading agreed to	3261
Mme France Gélinas	3261

MOTIONS**Committee sittings**

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams	3261
Motion agreed to	3261

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS**Adoption disclosure**

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	3261
-------------------------------	------

Tenant protection

MPP Jill Andrew	3261
-----------------------	------

Education funding

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche	3262
---------------------------	------

Emergency services

Mme France Gélinas	3262
--------------------------	------

Accessibility for persons with disabilities

Ms. Jessica Bell	3262
------------------------	------

Long COVID

MPP Jill Andrew	3263
-----------------------	------

Occupational health and safety

Mme France Gélinas	3263
--------------------------	------

Tenant protection

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche	3263
---------------------------	------

Accessibility for persons with disabilities

Ms. Doly Begum	3263
----------------------	------

Highway safety

Mme France Gélinas	3264
--------------------------	------

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR**2023 Ontario budget / Budget de l'Ontario de 2023**

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy	3264
Mrs. Daisy Wai	3265
Mr. John Vanthof	3266
Mr. Logan Kanapathi	3266
Ms. Doly Begum	3267
Mr. Anthony Leardi	3267
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	3267
Mr. Brian Saunderson	3267
Mr. Wayne Gates	3267

Mr. Stephen Crawford	3270
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	3271
Mr. John Jordan	3271
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	3271
Mr. Brian Saunderson.....	3272
Mr. Adil Shamji.....	3272
Ms. Stephanie Bowman.....	3273
Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	3274
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	3274
Mr. Logan Kanapathi.....	3274
Ms. Bhutla Karpoche.....	3275
Mr. Rick Byers	3275
Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	3275
Mr. John Jordan	3276
Ms. Doly Begum.....	3278
Mr. Brian Saunderson.....	3278
Mr. Wayne Gates	3278
Mr. Rick Byers	3278
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	3279
Ms. Bhutla Karpoche.....	3279
Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	3281
Mr. John Vanthof.....	3281
Ms. Laura Smith	3282
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	3282
Mr. Andrew Dowie.....	3282
Mr. Sheref Sabawy	3282
Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos.....	3283
Ms. Jessica Bell	3285
Mr. Anthony Leardi.....	3285
Mr. Chris Glover.....	3285
Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto	3286
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	3286
MPP Jill Andrew	3286
Mr. Billy Pang	3289
Mr. Peter Tabuns	3290
Mr. Stephen Crawford	3290
Ms. Jessica Bell	3290
Mr. Andrew Dowie.....	3290
Mr. Nolan Quinn.....	3291

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 30 March 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 30 mars 2023

The House met at 0900.

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

Prières / Prayers.

WITHDRAWAL OF BILL 89

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I rise to inform the House that Bill 89, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995, with respect to replacement workers, which was introduced yesterday by the member for Nickel Belt and co-sponsored by four other members, contravenes standing order 72(a), which provides that private members' public bills may be co-sponsored by up to four members. The bill is therefore out of order and will be removed from the Orders and Notices paper.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 VISANT À OEUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 29, 2023, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 79, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi, le travail et d'autres questions.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): When we last debated this bill, the member for Sudbury had made his presentation. Now we're on questions to the member for Sudbury relating to his remarks.

Questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm sure we can all remember Peter Kormos, MPP from Welland—an incredible human being. It's the 10th anniversary of his passing, so I just wanted to make sure that I mentioned that and that we're all thinking of Peter. I saw that Jeff Burch put a nice post up for him this morning.

My question on Working for Workers—I'm going to ask you what's not in the bill. This isn't our first Working for Workers bill; we've had three. Deeming is not in the bill. Anti-scab legislation is not in the bill. Maybe you can elaborate on why it wouldn't be, as our labour critic.

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to my colleague from Niagara Falls.

You spoke about Peter Kormos this morning. Peter Kormos had tabled anti-scab legislation to prevent

replacement workers from crossing picket lines, ever since Mike Harris had repealed it—when the previous NDP government had put anti-scab legislation in place, which actually strengthened negotiating ability.

We all know that more than 98% of negotiations are settled at the bargaining table; of the remaining 2%, there are very few of them that actually use replacement workers. Literally, when they use them, the employer uses these workers. They divide community. They break friendships. They leave long-lasting scars. It's not only bad for the community; it's bad for negotiations. We all know the best place to negotiate is the bargaining table, but artificially lengthening labour disputes with replacement workers just harms community and harms the finances of everyone involved.

This is a bill that workers have been asking for for a long time. It's a bill that the Conservative Party took away with Mike Harris, and it's a bill that the Liberal Party promised to bring forward. I remember sitting in the gallery over here, as a worker on strike, and, when they called for the vote, watching Liberals go into the back lobby to hide from the vote so that the Conservatives could vote it down. It's a bill that we need today. It's a bill that should be in a bill that's called Working for Workers.

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

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: My question for the member opposite is based on this premise, in terms of the proposed Working for Workers Act: We know that the men and women who serve our country in the reserve forces are heroes. When they are abroad or serving domestically, the last thing they need to worry about while keeping our country safe is whether or not their day jobs will be there when they get back. So why does the opposition not support expanding reservist leave for the brave men and women in uniform who serve our country in the reserve forces?

MPP Jamie West: Just to clarify, there seems to be a misunderstanding of the member of Durham that we don't support this part of the legislation. Why wouldn't we? It makes absolute sense. In my debate yesterday, I talked about how, as the OFL described, this was the lowest of the low-hanging fruit.

So there are things in here that are great, but really, this is a bill that seems more important to the Conservatives as a headline bill—to do multiple press conferences, talk about multiple things in the bill. Some of the stuff that they talked about in the press conference didn't make it in the bill. Clean washrooms wasn't in the bill, WSIB for firefighters wasn't in the bill—it was in the press conference, but not in the bill.

The stuff you're talking about—to the member opposite—these are things that are enshrined in collective bargaining agreements all the time, so I'm glad that they're going to be further enhanced in the Employment Standards Act.

What we're saying on this side is that there is much more we can do than just have a title—Working for Workers 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8—and actually have substance, like paid sick days, in a bill called Working for Workers.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The member and I both remember the strike of 2009-10 in Sudbury by USW 6500. The strike lasted one full year. One of the reasons that it was one of the longest-lasting strikes in Sudbury is because replacement workers were brought in. Replacement workers, since then, have had a really tough time.

There was a very nice man in my community who had a sick child, and he needed \$5,000 a month to keep his child in therapy. He decided to cross the picket line. He was also a coach for soccer in my community. All the families pulled out their kids from soccer, and the kids never played soccer that summer, until the coach was replaced. Real hardship was put on this family, on my community, because of replacement workers.

Do you think that replacement workers could be added into this bill to protect further families from the hardship that has happened in my community?

MPP Jamie West: I spent a year on the picket line watching replacement workers cross the picket line, and it's a frustrating experience, knowing that it artificially extends the strikes. I had an interview this morning on the CBC, and I said that our strike should have ended months ahead of time. I'm very clear about that, and I think anyone from either side—company or union—would agree that it lasted too long because of the use of replacement workers.

The thing that stood out to me, when speaking to these workers—because you have the opportunity to speak with them as they're going past the picket line—is that they were scared and they were worried, and they felt like they had no other option. When you dangle a carrot of a lot of money in front of a worker who is having a hard time putting food on the table or affording rent, and this is the only option, the only work they can find, they are desperate, and they get used by the company and left behind. So it's really important that we have legislation like this that prevents these workers from being used.

0910

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

Mr. McNaughton has moved second reading of Bill 79, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

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

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, it will be deferred until the next instance of deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

2023 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 23, 2023, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I recognize the member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Speaker—and good morning to my colleagues, from across the floor. I want to preface my comments by saying I'll be sharing my time with the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane this morning.

The budget was released a week ago. I think it's safe to say that as the information contained within that budget, or not contained within that budget, is hitting our communities, as you peel back the layers on budget 2023, we're learning all sorts of things that weren't in the speech that was given last Thursday by the finance minister as he went on his road show across the province of Ontario—his virtual road show, if you will.

One of those things really just came to our attention yesterday morning—and I am going to start off my comments by giving this a bit of a theme. For us, this is a budget that's “The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.” Unfortunately, sometimes, in these circumstances, even when you're trying to do something good, you're so stubbornly attached to the bad that it turns very ugly for the people of the province that we serve.

Yesterday morning, we found out that doctors across Waterloo region were receiving notices from public health informing them that it was now their responsibility—these are family doctors in Niagara, in Hamilton, in London, in Timiskaming–Cochrane who were told that it is now their responsibility to arrange the courier and the transfer of vaccines from public health to doctors' offices. Yesterday was March 29. For some reason, this became the news of the day yesterday for medical doctors.

The doctors who came to us through the Ontario Medical Association, during finance committee, were so frustrated, and they did make some proposals around streamlining their work, reducing the administrative burden that they face on a day-to-day basis, in the interest of ensuring that they could see more patients. This was actually in Windsor—when the Ontario Medical Association came to speak and proposed a solution around ensuring that the administrative overhead could be lightened for doctors so that they could see more patients. This is actually in the interest of all Ontarians. They came to that table in good faith, I think.

There are 2.1 million people in this province who do not have a family doctor, and the family doctor is still the gateway into the health care system—you need those referrals to see specialists, for instance. Family doctors ensure continuity of care. Family doctors are trusted people in their communities.

And this is not just COVID vaccines—I want to make sure people know this; this is childhood vaccines, MMR, influenza, shingles, for those of us who are in our fifties.

Usually, what has happened in the past is that because vaccines needed to be carefully transported, they needed to be refrigerated. There's an audit on those vaccines. Someone is keeping track, one hopes, of the dates and expiry dates on those vaccines, and you need a central place to take care of that information. Usually, a courier would deliver through cold chain transfer from public health into doctors' offices, where people who need vaccines would happily go and get their vaccines.

This trickle-down downloading of health care costs on to family physicians makes zero sense. We should have learned during this pandemic that people need access to vaccines. We should be reducing all barriers to vaccines. I hope that this is a non-partisan issue people are facing.

This particular doctor let me know that the burnout level for family doctors is already at a breaking point. This is also something that the finance minister heard during his separate consultation processes, and that we heard as a committee, loud and clear—that doctors want to do more, they can't do more, and you shouldn't be asking them to do any more. And now they have to arrange for vaccines to be couriered and managed from public health down to the local office. He said, "I think what this government should be afraid of ... as a physician base we are already frayed and barely holding on. So more and more physicians will be leaving the profession. The frustrating part is lack of consultation, which is a pattern"—with this government. This came out of nowhere. It caught people by surprise. It makes zero sense. The cost savings for the government are nominal at best. He said, "How does this make sense?" It doesn't.

One of the other issues that came to the fore, and we've been questioning the health minister this week on it, is those people in this province who do not have insurance for health care. That health care piece is really determined by having identification, having an address, having a health card.

With so many people in this province—now a growing number of evictions, a growing number of homeless people. We have encampments in Peterborough. We have encampments in Sudbury. We have encampments here in Toronto. In Waterloo region, in downtown Kitchener, there is a tent city. It is Canada. People in this province, in the winter, should not be living in tents.

It was really interesting to hear the Minister of Health talk about this because she said, "This was a plan that the Liberals put in, and we are going to go back to that Liberal plan," essentially. That Liberal plan, which does not fund the full health care package for those who are homeless or who don't have identification, was the status quo prior to the pandemic. Because of the pandemic, some dollars came in, and people realized that if we don't take care of those who are homeless, who need those extra wraparound supports in their community, there actually is an extra cost down the line. Also, it's the compassionate thing to do, one would say, maybe; the humane thing to do. What we heard is the health minister say, "No, we're not cancelling it. We're just going back to what the Liberals had brought in." Well, what the Liberals had brought in wasn't good

enough then, and it's not good enough now for those who are uninsured.

I sense some defensiveness on behalf of the government members.

Yesterday, a member got up and did a statement on the virtual health care resources for those who are uninsured and homeless. Well, let me tell you: You don't get very good WiFi in a tent in an encampment.

0920

This is something that has frustrated me now, going into five years—that there is a level of privilege that determines how policy and legislation is made in this place. It's a disconnect between this Pink Palace, this fortress of so-called democracy, when the transparency in our dollars is seriously undermined through the budgeting process. That dissonance was actually really well captured in the Toronto Star editorial about the budget. This is a direct quote from the editorial: "Overall, there was clanging dissonance between the budget's palpable self-satisfaction and the economic anxiety, rising interest rates, soaring prices, health care concerns that have hit Ontario residents hard."

This is why my comments on budget day a week ago were, "I've never seen a government so gleefully celebrating mediocrity." When you have the funding, when the funding is there in an unallocated contingency fund; when you have higher, increased revenue coming into this place—sure, you didn't plan for the high revenue, but that high revenue is generated through high inflationary costs of services, and that is generated by the people of this province. The least that this government could do in budget 2023 is alleviate some of those cost-of-living pressures that Ontarians are facing around housing, around food and—as you'll hear later on—around health care costs that are going up, private health care costs.

While I'm on the editorial, I think it warrants a second round. This is what the editorial said:

"Thursday was a complacent mishmash.

"But if it was uninspired and unimaginative, it was also largely unmemorable....

"The Premier—who often empathizes with the many serious problems facing Ontarians—seems to have been sufficiently comfy with things as they are that he and Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy proposed to do nothing particularly dramatic" to address them.

At finance committee, we heard from people who are at the breaking point. They have hit that tipping point. We heard about people saying they just can't do it anymore. We heard it from doctors. We heard it from nurses. We heard it from educators. We heard it from child care folks, who are saying, "Come on, how are you ever going to achieve \$10-a-day child care if you don't have the people to actually take care of the children?"

Bill 124, the unconstitutional piece of legislation that this government brought forward, which caps workers' raise of pay at 1% per year, is driving very good people out of this province. Out-migration is a huge issue for the province of Ontario. It doesn't seem to be on the government's radar. They sometimes talk about getting people

back and getting those nurses back into our health care system, while Bill 124 is still being fought in the courts. The courts have deemed it unconstitutional. They have said it's a violation of charter rights. It should never have come to the floor of this Legislature. This was, I think, the 15th court case that this government has had to be dealing with, and yet the government is still fighting Bill 124 in the courts.

If this was House of Cards, people would say, "No, even this is too much." Maybe another show, like— anyway, I'm not going to go there, because I'm trying to be polite today.

Obviously, our leader and our team feel that this budget does not meet the moment. It doesn't recognize the urgency, the need to address the cost of living. It doesn't address the cost pressures that folks are experiencing. It doesn't even address the number one issue—other than housing—that we heard during finance committee, which is health care. You've created this parallel health care program that is for-profit, which will actually further undermine the public health system that we care about and that we think is worth fighting for.

This editorial from the Toronto Star went on to say, "With ... plenty of runway until his next appointment with voters," the Premier "might have been expected to use this window for bold initiatives." We agree.

"But there was no such sense of urgency that the crunch facing Ontarians was more than they should be expected to bear."

And then this is the good quote: "If this budget were a Christmas present, it would be a three-pack of white socks. Not entirely useless. But an exercise in going through the motions." I know my colleague from finance committee was defending the white socks. Socks are very usable. Everybody needs them. But if there's a flood outside, socks are not helpful. I would invest in some rubber boots, if I had to make a comparison.

Clearly, for many regular Ontarians, this budget fell flat, and also for seniors, I would say. Aside from picking fights with the nurses, the PSWs, the ECEs across the province—I suspect you'll have the doctors discussing this whole downloading of vaccine transfer very soon. We're putting out a call to the OMA to find out how widespread this is.

This is actually a lesson in how not to design a budget and how having a press release and having various media announcements—as we saw through some other pieces of legislation, around the presumptive coverage for firefighters for instance. That's not in one of the—what bill? Bill 79?

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Bill 79. That's not there, but you talk about it.

This is another pattern of behaviour. I'm going to get to transparency. I remember—because the Conservatives were opposition for 15 years of Liberal rule, as well.

Mr. Wayne Gates: How many?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Fifteen. And they did some propping up as well, I have to say. They voted with the Liberals more than you would imagine.

Certainly, we brought forward the presumptive coverage for firefighters through our past leader, Andrea Horwath. There were a lot of games played on that particular day. I happened to be here. I was job-shadowing Andrea at the time. I'll never forget being in this place, sitting in the members' gallery with fire chiefs from across the province. She had introduced her private member's bill. It had lots of political support, lots of community support, but the Liberals were not going to give it to her—they weren't, because that's who they are, and we've actually seen a piece of legislation play itself out this week in a similar manner. So I was sitting there, and I had never seen this happen before—first reading, second reading, third reading all happened in the course of half an hour. I was sitting between two massive fire chiefs, and they were just crying, they were just bawling, because of course, they know people—actually, in all of our communities, we know firefighters who have contracted secondary and third cancers from exposure in the course of their job. So when the government says, "Why don't you support this?"—we were already there 15 years ago. I have to say, Adam Overgaard, who is the firefighter union president in Waterloo, already knows where we are. Firefighters know New Democrats, and they know where their support is. Just because you introduce a little motion like that or a little regulatory change in a piece of legislation like that—they know where our hearts are and where our energy goes.

Actually, it was really good this morning—I started off my day by watching the speech from Peter Kormos. My colleague from Niagara Falls mentioned it earlier. It was one of those just-in-time moments, where you hear the right thing at the right time and it gives you some energy and some hope, because his message was the same to the Liberals at the time. We know who we are, the people who support us know who we are, and we know why we're here and we know why we're fighting.

That's why this budget is so problematic for us—because regardless of the press releases, regardless of the communications strategy and the round tables and the outreach, what really matters is where the money is going.

This leads me to a very concerning pattern with this government around transparency.

Fortunately, in the province of Ontario, we do have the Financial Accountability Officer. This is a non-partisan position. The office itself is engaged in monitoring expenditures. That is what the FAO does—he does it, and his office does this in relatively real time. They report quarterly. You can go on the website. You can look at these numbers. You can track. If you have a particular ministry that you're concerned about, you can see what the government promised to spend and what the government actually spent.

0930

Increasingly, with this government, there's a disconnect between the budgeted number and the number that actually gets out the door. Increasingly, that funding is going into what we now call a contingency fund, which very few governments have ever had, but it's otherwise

known as a slush fund. The reason why that slush fund is so important is that—in a democracy, especially in Westminster democracies, budgets are supposed to be approved by the Legislature. But with the government's habit of hoarding the cash in massive contingency funds and making radical in-year changes to the spending plan, this Legislature increasingly cannot trust that the budget presented will be what the government actually spends. So we would argue, and I think Peter Kormos, if he was here, would argue that that lack of transparency is actually bad for democracy.

I know that this government is not particularly concerned with democracy, because we haven't seen, for instance, your mandate letters for your cabinet members. Why does this matter? Because of the people we serve, the electorate, who voted in the last election—and who didn't vote. Only 17.8% of the people of this province voted in the last election. It does not instill a lot of confidence, but it also speaks to a lack of trust and a level of cynicism in how people feel about government and how they feel about politicians, quite honestly.

That lack of transparency not only is bad for democracy, but it's also very concerning around the reduction of trust in budgets. That's so important. If the finance minister stands up and delivers a budget with great pomp and ceremony but then nobody really believes what actually is in that document, that isn't good for anybody, I would argue.

When we follow the money, there is a pattern of this government not getting that money out the door. One of the examples that I often quote, because now it's still in place, is the services for community and social services—this is those programs like Meals on Wheels, for instance. The government, a year ago, made a huge, huge announcement—a kind of a hopeful announcement, I would have to say—that they were going to invest \$1 billion in these community agencies. We were saying, “That's a lot of money, and that's a long time coming, and good on you for doing it.” Unfortunately, only \$130 million of that promised \$1 billion got out. So when Meals on Wheels came to present, they said, “We're going to be reducing our coverage and our services by 30%.” That's 30% less seniors who are going to get a visit. That's 30% less vulnerable people who are going to have eyes on them; who are going to say, “This person is obviously in distress.” Those programs are more than about nutrition; they're about connection. And that is going in the wrong direction, because if you don't have eyes on vulnerable people, if you're not making those connections with community, if isolation is becoming a serious issue—we now know that loneliness kills and those folks end up in the hospital. They end up in one of the emergency rooms in our hospitals, unless it's one of the 435 that were closed—435?

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, 435 over the course of this year reduced hours or closed altogether. Never have we seen emergency room closures to this degree. An emergency room is supposed to be there for you when you're in an emergency.

So what does this government do? Even when the paramedics have been sounding the alarm—code red, code white—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Code black.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —code black. These are ambulances that have been lined up in front of emergency rooms. It's a huge issue. In Waterloo region and I'm sure in some of the other ridings, when people call 911, they usually really need an ambulance. They need a paramedic. They need medical assistance. It's not one of the calls that you make and you're saying, “Well, I can stay on hold for an hour.”

So what does the government do? Instead of addressing the core issue, which is having the appropriate resources for nurses and having the appropriate staff in hospitals, Bill 124 is compounding that problem, because you cannot recruit into a broken system. You can throw some money at some of those nurses—they're not going to go back into that workplace because it is an unhealthy workplace and they're very aware of how unhealthy it is. So what they will do is alleviate the wait-list for the ambulances—so they will give you a hallway nurse. Again, this was a program that the Liberals brought in. The only reason we found out about it at the time is because I was in a hospital with my husband and one of his former students was the hallway nurse. He said, “What are you doing here?” She said, “I'm the hallway nurse.” There's a separate nursing category. It came out in committee, and the government said, “We didn't create that position”—but actually, it was a funded line. At least I could track that money, as the finance critic. There are only two recognized parties in this place, and I take my job very seriously. Finding those lines and identifying where those resources are going or not going is obviously really important for us because it's how we try to hold the government to account.

Anyway, now we've got more hallway nurses, but you still haven't addressed the core issue of why the backlog is happening with the paramedics and the ambulances. But you're quick to put a Band-Aid on it. It is a flashy little funding announcement—\$500 million across the province to address this issue—but you haven't addressed the issue. You've just bought yourself some time, and people are still hurting throughout that process.

In the last quarter, this government also failed to address the \$570 million in cash that had been budgeted for health, education, and children's and social services.

And the education funding in this particular budget is a bit of a shell game, I have to say, because the government has incorporated the federal dollars for the \$10-a-day national child care plan. That \$2.3 billion that the government says they are investing in schools is not going to elementary schools, it's not going to secondary schools—it's parked there because it looks good. Even that \$2.3 billion that's allocated for child care—because child care falls under the Ministry of Education—is not going to get out there too. Do you know why? Because people are not entering the early learning and care sector. They're not entering that child care sector because it pays so poorly. When the government says, “We value you, but

you're only worth \$19 an hour"—to take care of our children in those first five years, no less, when brain development is a key factor, when you're dealing with two- and three-year-olds who were born into the pandemic and whose language acquisition was seriously compromised by masks, for instance.

I think this is the frustrating piece, overall. The government really has the right language, "biggest budget ever," but when you follow where the money is going, the money is not getting to the most important places: those pressure points which (1) could make people's lives better and, (2) could save money down the line—because what we heard at finance committee through the budget consultations is that housing is health care.

0940

This government has—I guess you can call it a housing plan. It comes by way of Bill 23, which we did not support because it takes away the very tools that municipalities need to facilitate housing in Ontario. When AMO says to us, "The cumulative impact of proposed changes to municipal fees and charges is significant and contrary to the widely accepted concept that growth should pay for growth"—I just want to say that these are the 444 municipalities across Ontario, who voice their concerns through their provincial association, which is the Association of Municipalities Ontario. This is what they say: "While AMO would like to support the province's housing objectives, it cannot support changes that largely place the burden of carrying the costs associated with development onto municipalities. AMO believes that the proposed changes may contradict the goal of building more housing in the long term as it merely shifts the financial burden of growth-related infrastructure onto existing taxpayers."

So not only do we have a cost-of-living crisis in Ontario, but we have a government that is willing to download the cost of housing to municipalities, which, in turn, is going to increase the taxes of the people in communities. You're throwing gasoline on the fire. Our critic on housing did such a good job of doing an analysis of the tax increases across the province. Every municipality, with a few exceptions, had to increase their taxes to just carry out their planning, the government's own objective, of facilitating more housing in Ontario.

When you don't listen to people, just like the doctor I started my conversation off with—just like doctors were not consulted about downloading of vaccine transfer costs to family physicians. They would have told you, "We only bill the province \$3 to \$5 for those vaccines. So there are two choices: one, we don't deliver the vaccines; two, we pass the cost onto the person who is getting the vaccine. Those are the two choices." However, the government doesn't know that, because the government didn't talk to the doctors about downloading of vaccine costs to family physicians—as they didn't do for AMO, as well.

"Municipalities are attempting to make sense of the government's response to the housing supply crisis brought about by the COVID-19 demand spike.

"AMO will continue to shine a light on what is wrong with legislative changes that are based on a false premise."

This is a very painful battle of words between the municipalities, which largely manage municipal housing stock planning, and the government, which has removed rent control, so we have record evictions. They are dead set against building attainable, affordable housing.

We have said to the government that developers are in the business of building homes to make money, and some of those homes, now, are going to be built on the greenbelt. The greenbelt is not where new immigrants are going to be living, I have to tell you. The new immigrants who come into KW want to be close to public transit, grocery stores, schools. None of those things exist out on the greenbelt. Do you know why? Because the greenbelt is sacred. It is environmentally sensitive. It is key to the overall health and well-being of this province. It is something that the Ontario farming association has said, "Listen"—how many acres a day?

Mr. John Vanthof: Some 319.6.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Some 319.6 acres a day in this province are bulldozed for development. This is another thing that doesn't make any sense to us either. What we learned during the pandemic is that we need to be more self-sufficient. We need to have a stronger local economy. We need to take care of our food security systems, our worker systems. Yet the government is not taking a strong stance, I would say, at all against land degradation in Ontario.

With the greenbelt—to their credit, the Liberals had it brought in 15 years ago, and that correlated with good places to grow, which intensified planning in our city cores. Because the infrastructure was already there, it therefore reduced the cost of the housing, so that costs of the housing were not passed on to families who were looking to buy.

But right now, we even have a rental crisis in Ontario. Because this government has removed rent control, we have seniors, right now—I'm dealing with a lady in my riding who has lived in her apartment for 29 years. It is her home. She is being demovicted. It's a six-storey building of the 1950s, 1960s era. It's a beautiful building, but they want to knock it down, and they want to build condos. There is literally no place for her to go. It's funny—because there are two or three other senior ladies who have reached out. We try to help them navigate a system that really is not designed to be navigated, especially when you don't have the stock. I was telling one lady, "There's a couple of other women who are of your age and who are in a similar situation, on a fixed income." She said to me, "Well, maybe the three of us should live together," which made me think of the Golden Girls. But that's not a realistic option for women of that generation, who did not work, did not have a pension, and so they really are—there's no extra money here. So when you increase the rent for some of these folks, they're well past eating or paying the heating bill—they're at a desperate place in their lives. I don't believe that seniors in Ontario should ever get to that place or should have to worry about getting upsold on their cataract surgery, when they go for eye surgery at one of those for-profit, private clinics.

CBC did a really good story last Tuesday about this—I've shared it; our leader has shared it. It tells the story of why, when you pull public health resources and services out of the public system and you go to a for-profit, private clinic, upselling is the norm. That also, I want to say, with greatest respect, does not help with the cost-of-living challenge, especially for seniors who are on fixed incomes.

Just to go back to AMO and go back to housing—because I'm going to pass this along to my good colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

This budget missed the moment. Removing funding for uninsured Ontarians who need health care is a very poor decision.

The Kingston mayor came to us at the committee. Kingston has spent \$18 million trying to keep 120 vulnerable people out of the emergency room. They did so, and they were very successful, but this is not where municipal budgets are usually going—to do mental health services, to do crisis intervention.

We heard yesterday from the member from London. London has spent \$22 million around supportive housing. They've dipped into their reserves, and they've allocated funding from their budgets.

So that's two municipalities—Kingston and London—who last year dipped into their reserves, who were doing the supportive housing piece that the provincial government should be responsible for.

Housing is a provincial responsibility, but the government has \$202 million allocated in this budget—and so that was part of my “good, bad, ugly” thing. It's good that there's finally money for supportive housing; what's bad is that it's so insufficient, based on the two municipalities that I've just given you an example of. And it's going to get ugly because those municipalities are now going to be fighting for that money and trying to prove to this government that they're worth that \$202 million.

As I've already pointed out, municipalities who have challenged Bill 23 are not wrong. They're not wrong to challenge this legislation at all.

With that, Madam Speaker, I am going to pass this along to my good friend and colleague—and I hope that you enjoyed budget 2023, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.”

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House and speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane and on behalf of the official opposition and in response to the budget motion.

As I was sitting listening to Minister Bethlenfalvy give his virtual road tour of southern Ontario, many of the places—actually, every town that he mentioned I've been to; my family comes from southern Ontario. Specifically, St. Thomas, regarding the proposed battery plant for Volkswagen—the NDP helped fast-track that bill through the Legislature. We care about jobs. We understand. As I was listening to the virtual tour—and I listened intently. I drove home the next day, thinking about the virtual road

tour and thinking that there aren't very many people, probably, who know my neck of the woods, my part of the province.

0950

The first thing that I noticed driving home was that at the work yard for the contractor who takes care of Highway 11 in the Temagami area, the flags were flying at half-mast, in respect to the snowplow operator who had lost his life a few days before in northwestern Ontario. That's not an uncommon occurrence for the people who take care of our roads. The last time I talked to our local contractor, I believe there were 260 or 270 major accidents with snow-cleaning equipment, not counting the ones since that meeting. That's what happens on some of the roads in the province.

I listened very intently, and they were talking about the Ring of Fire. The Ring of Fire has got a few other problems, because the government doesn't appear to be asking for free, prior and informed consent from all the First Nations. But that's an issue for another day.

We were talking to the road builders' association. Something the government might not have thought about is our road infrastructure. The roads that we have now that you have to take to get to the Ring of Fire, 11 and 17, are not good enough to actually get the equipment to build the road to the Ring of Fire. That is a serious concern.

You may not believe this, Madam Speaker, but once you get to Barrie, Highways 11 and 400 split. Highway 11 is still a four-lane highway, and so is Highway 400, but at some point that stops; it stops for Highway 11 in North Bay. So you're thinking everything is fine, and then you crest Thibeault Hill and the world changes—because it is two-lane; it's basically a southern Ontario country road. It's paved. It has narrow shoulders. That's the Trans-Canada Highway. That's the highway that you think is going to help you get to the Ring of Fire. That is the highway that, since January, to March 29, has had major closures 11 times, and not closures for five minutes, but hours and hours—and that's actually not accurate, because it was closed again yesterday.

“Let's all go to the Ring of Fire”—how? How are you going to get to the Ring of Fire when we don't have the infrastructure to actually get transit, to get goods across the country now?

It is a shame in Ontario that the Trans-Canada Highway that goes through northern Ontario is a two-lane country highway. That's what it is.

The government can say, “We have pushed very hard”—and they have moved the average for cleaning up, from 16 hours after a major snowstorm or after a snow event to 12. Give credit where credit is due. They moved a little bit, because we've been pushing them like crazy for years.

To Minister Mulroney's credit, they're going to institute a “2+1” pilot project, which is basically extended passing lanes and a barrier on the passing lanes so you can't cut into the passing lane. It's a pilot project on 14 or 15 kilometres. That highway is thousands of kilometres, and a pilot project of 14 or 15 kilometres is not going to

get you to the Ring of Fire. You need to think about that right away.

Northern Ontario has—as does the rest of the province—lots of jobs. We have more jobs than we have people, and we have good jobs.

I was talking to one of our major employers in my riding. A mine mechanic in Kirkland Lake can make \$300,000 a year. They have a hard time finding people. Why? Because we don't have a lot of social services in northern Ontario. Things that the member from Waterloo was talking about, that they're worried about losing, that they are losing in northern Ontario—we never had them, or we lost them already.

We have local hospitals, and they do what they can, but if you need to see a specialist, you need to come to the hospitals down here. We have the northern travel grant, and that travel subsidy hasn't changed in years and years and years. So equal access in health care for northerners has been gone a long time ago, and this budget completely and totally ignores that.

This budget talked a lot about the riches of northern Ontario, about the Ring of Fire—and there are many other riches of northern Ontario. But government after government—and this one probably more than any—has ignored the social needs of what people in the north need to provide the riches to the rest of the province.

The biggest gold mine, I believe, in North America, Detour Gold, is in the district of Cochrane—right next to my riding, actually. The town of Cochrane is in my riding; the mine is in the next riding. It's a very big producer of gold, and we are soon going to have a big producer of nickel in that area—Canada Nickel.

Timmins is a mining—the Minister of Mines will know how big mining is in Timmins.

There's so much money coming out of the north.

Do you know something else about the district of Cochrane, where Timmins and Cochrane and Detour Gold—what they are? The rate of homelessness in the district of Cochrane—covered by the Cochrane social services board—per thousand people is the highest in the province. It's minus 40 lots of times, where I live, and homelessness now is a tragic issue. I'm not discounting it anywhere else, but very few people think about how it's the highest where it's the coldest, and where the riches come from. But for some reason, the services don't come back.

It's great to take—and we have experienced that in the north for as long as we've been there. Cobalt, the first silver boom; Kirkland, the first gold boom; Timmins—the original stock exchange for Ontario, the first one, was in Cobalt. But all the money eventually came to Toronto, eventually came to the south.

Now we hear this government saying, “Trust us. You, especially Indigenous people, are going to benefit incredibly from the Ring of Fire.” It has never happened before. They have trusted before, when they signed treaties. It never happened. It's not going to happen this time either. They know that—unless they stand up for themselves.

1000

The finance committee travelled through northern Ontario. It stopped in Timmins. It stopped in Sudbury.

Primary health care, specifically, is a tough issue in northern Ontario.

I'd like to read a quote from someone who presented at the finance committee in Sudbury. She's actually the president and CEO of West Nipissing General Hospital, Ms. Sue LeBeau. She was also, before that, the CEO and president of the Red Lake Margaret Cochenour Memorial Hospital. She's got a lot of experience in running hospitals in northern Ontario. I'm going to read directly from her statement. She talks about her experiences at the hospital: “But the most harrowing experience that I had and that our team had during my time there was the closure of our emergency department due to lack of staffing. It was a scary time, it was a short time, and it is something that we would not want to relive, and it is something that—my colleagues and myself in the north have struggled to maintain core services and to be able to manage to keep serving our communities.” She also identified one of the major problems that this government is perpetuating with Bill 124. Again, this is directly from her: “In terms of agency nursing, to paint the picture locally, our hospital, West Nipissing, has expended \$1.5 million for agency nursing over the first three quarters of this fiscal year. That represents about 10% of our budget, for 10 nurses”—\$150,000 per nurse, for three quarters of the year. “Those costs, of course, are not budgeted. Agency nursing has become a necessity in northern Ontario. However, it is not a long-term solution. Our loyal local nurses are impacted by these agency nurses....” They're demoralized by this—and the government is not standing idly by while this is happening; they are perpetuating it with Bill 124. They're forcing health care staff out of their chosen profession, or out of their profession, working for the public side, and they're forcing them to work for the agencies—and the same nurses come back into that hospital for twice the cost.

The government and the Minister of Finance say, “Oh, we're putting more money than ever into health care”—that could very well be, but a lot of that money is going to the private sector, who are running those agencies and siphoning money out for profit.

Why don't you just pay the nurses what they're worth and cut out the agencies? How can you pretend to be careful with the province's finances when you don't understand that basic principle—or actually, you do understand that basic principle and you're perpetuating it.

It's incredibly tough to sit here and stand here and see that there are solutions. We can't provide solutions for everything, but there are solutions staring you in the face—and, yes, for some of them, you're going to have to admit that you made mistakes.

Bill 124 seemed like an easy solution at the time—holding public servants to 1%, and you will save costs. You just didn't realize that public servants, especially those in health care, are going to be able to move with their feet when you're not paying them with respect. You talk

about respect, but when you're not paying them with respect, they're going to move with their feet. And when you still need them, then you have to hire them back through private agencies, at more cost. It's killing the system.

I'm going to go back a little bit to my road tour—because I want people to come to northern Ontario. We need people. It is a great place to live. We have our challenges, and that's what we're trying to bring to people's attention, but it's a great place to live. If you decide to come, I'm just going to give you a couple of pointers.

If you like stopping at ONroutes—because you can get whatever food you want, you know the market, and you know you can load up for the trip—past Barrie, there are none. Ontario stops at Barrie for ONroutes—nothing. Crest Thibeault Hill and your four-lanes stop. There are none.

We have a lot of transports on Highway 11—it's the Trans-Canada Highway; it is where the goods cross from one end of Canada to the other. There are very few places for those transports to stop. There are very few parking spots for transports. That's a big problem, because they have no place to rest, and we have lots of accidents with transports—and you wonder how it got there. With a transport, you just can't pull off to the shoulder on Highway 11, because you're not coming back on, because the shoulders are narrow and you're stuck. So be prepared.

When the highway is closed, if you cross Thibeault Hill—at Thibeault Hill, there's a big sign that says the highway might be closed. But if it's closed right after you cross that sign, you might be on the highway for hours in a line, and there are no emergency services that are going to come find you—maybe volunteers; volunteers from Temagami do this a lot. So you better bring a blanket, you better bring chocolate bars, and you better have a full tank of gas when you cross Thibeault Hill.

That's northern Ontario. I am not trying to disparage it. I love northern Ontario. I'm never going to live anywhere else.

My last point I'd like to make—I'd like to give a shout-out to a group. This government is talking a lot about agriculture in northern Ontario. I'm a farmer. I've farmed in northern Ontario my whole life, and northern Ontario is a great place to farm. If you want to know something about farming in northern Ontario—you've got an incredible chance to do it on April 13 and 14, at the Earlton Farm Show. The Earlton Farm Show is an exposition of agricultural services available in our area. You will talk to people who actually make a good living farming in our area. They're very good farmers. In the Little Clay Belt around Timiskaming and farther north in the Great Clay Belt, there's a lot of expertise there. If you're thinking about farming in northern Ontario or seeing what farming is like in northern Ontario, please come to the farm show. The volunteers who put that together put a lot of effort into it. This is the first one in three years because of COVID. I'm going to be there. Everyone who has anything to do with agriculture in northern Ontario is going to be there. I

have been warned that the Minister of Agriculture might even be there. We will welcome her with open arms.

But, please, we have our problems in northern Ontario. The government has to recognize them and address them so that we can truly fill our place in the province.

To talk about the Ring of Fire—when your connection to the Ring of Fire is Highways 11 and 17, two-lane roads, you're dreaming. They can barely handle the traffic on them now. They can't because their accident stats—people talk about Ontario having the best roads in North America; they're certainly not 11 and 17, and those are the roads that connect southern Ontario to the Ring of Fire, and you need to pay as much attention to them as what you're paying to the rest of the province.

I'd like to thank you for your time, Speaker.

1010

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: I'm going to be sharing my time with the member for Richmond Hill, and I will simply be mindful of the fact that I will begin my remarks now, conclude at 10:15, and continue this afternoon.

In that context, it is my pleasure to join the debate in this House with regard to the Building a Strong Ontario Act, our budget bill. This budget confirms our government's commitment to invest in Ontario's future and enhance our competitiveness within a global economy, with a responsible, targeted approach to help people and businesses.

The budget speech that was presented last week to this House by the Minister of Finance outlines this government's priorities for building a strong economic foundation to provide Ontario's growing population with highly skilled, well-paying jobs, while at the same time attracting global investments in manufacturing and research. We are exercising fiscal prudence by keeping Ontario's finances in check as we make the necessary investments in health care, education, infrastructure and transit, while being on track to balance Ontario's books with a \$200-million surplus by 2024-25. This is what Ontarians asked for. This is what Ontarians expect. And we are delivering both on growth and fiscal responsibility. This is our duty. This is our pledge. We are getting it done.

Speaker, this budget is all about people. This budget is about investing in workers, in families and everyday Ontarians who have asked this government to live within its means while investing in the programs that workers and families desperately need to purchase a home, raise a family and save for the future. This government is a citizens' government that reflects the will and the expectations of the people.

Because of the failed tax-and-spend policies of the previous Liberal government, Ontario lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs between 2004 and 2018. The previous Liberal government, which was propped up by the NDP for three years, thought they could spend their way to prosperity, and look where that left Ontario—higher debt, lost jobs, and a downgrade of Ontario's credit rating.

As evidence that nothing has changed, the federal Liberal government, also propped up by the NDP, delivered a budget this past Tuesday which included record spending, tax increases, and zero investments in municipalities, business, or assistance for everyday Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member from Durham.

Debate deemed adjourned.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY'S DAFFODIL CAMPAIGN

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I am pleased to rise in the House today in support of the Canadian Cancer Society's daffodil campaign.

Every April, the Canadian Cancer Society's daffodil campaign raises essential funds to save lives and improve the quality of life for people affected by cancer, spreading hope from community to community. A key part of this effort is supporting the world-leading work of cancer researchers in Canada to transform cancer care and improve the treatment experience.

I'm thankful to the Canadian Cancer Society for all the work they do across this province, including in my riding.

I am confident that everyone in this chamber had or currently has a loved one who was diagnosed with cancer. I have a sibling who was diagnosed a year ago and today is fighting for her life.

As the member of provincial Parliament for Newmarket–Aurora, I'm committed to continuing to work closely with the Canadian Cancer Society as they establish health policies to prevent cancer and better support those living with this disease here in Ontario.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today on behalf of London West families of children with autism.

After four and a half years on the wait-list, Sarah Farrants felt hopeful when her seven-year-old son Mason was invited to register for the OAP in October, but she has heard absolutely nothing since. While she waits, the one-time funding that paid for Mason's speech therapy has run out, and so has Sarah's hope for Mason's future.

After a 10-month wait for an assessment for his three-year-old son Luke, Sean Menard was told he could wait years for OAP funding. Sean wants a plan from this government to clear the backlog and get Luke the critical early intervention he needs. Sean desperately wants Luke to speak one day. Sean said, "Without help from the government, he may never speak a single word to his mother or me."

Even for families who have been approved, the autism program is broken. Virginia Ridley's two teenage sons

receive OAP funding, but Virginia struggles to find services geared to youth and faces constant delays getting reimbursed. At the end of February, she was out of pocket \$9,000.

With no mention of autism in the 2023 budget, these families feel abandoned by the Ford government.

Where is the plan, where is the urgency to fix the OAP and get Mason and Luke and Virginia's sons the services they need and deserve?

FESTIVAL OF THE MAPLES

Mr. John Jordan: This year marks the 47th anniversary of the annual Festival of the Maples in Perth, Ontario. Since 1976, Perth has celebrated a legacy of liquid gold against a backdrop of magnificent heritage architecture on the banks of the Tay River.

Hosted by the Perth chamber of commerce, the Festival of the Maples embraces all that Lanark county has to offer, with artisans, vendors, musicians and award-winning maple syrup producers. For residents, guests, and tourists of every age, the day begins with steaming stacks of pancakes and unwinds with music, shopping, dining and classic entertainment, including the historic sap-tapping contest and the wood cookie crosscut saw competition.

Lanark county is the maple syrup capital of Ontario, and at this time of year visitors are hiking our sugar bush trails, touring award-winning multi-generational sugar camps, and heading home with some of the finest maple syrup in the world.

Throughout Lanark county, you'll find maple syrup featured in restaurants, bakeries, coffee shops and distilleries, all eager to embrace the sweet taste of spring.

Last year's festival featured 160 vendors and welcomed over 30,000 guests—and this is a town of 9,000—to this event.

Today, I extend a warm Lanark county welcome to one and all to experience the 47th Festival of the Maples, on Saturday, April 29, in beautiful heritage Perth. I hope to see you there.

AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Malheureusement, le gouvernement de M. Ford ne répond pas aux besoins des Franco-Ontariens. Le budget provincial de cette année est un exemple clair de cet échec. Par exemple, le seul collège qui ne reçoit pas le programme « learn and stay » est le seul collège pour les francophones. C'est vraiment incroyable.

Le gouvernement manque également une véritable vision pour les Franco-Ontariens. Nous avons besoin d'un gouvernement qui investit dans des communautés fortes et solidaires; qui offre des soins de santé publics de qualité, un soutien à la santé mentale, une éducation de qualité, des logements abordables et des transports publics fiables.

Encore une chose : il arrive souvent que les autoroutes 11 et 17 soient fermées à cause des accidents de poids lourd. D'abord, il faut embaucher les contrôleurs pour les

stations d'inspection. Aussi, nous devons contrôler les permis de conduire des chauffeurs de poids lourd parce que, trop souvent, les chauffeurs nouveaux ne sont pas préparés à conduire dans les conditions du Nord.

Le gouvernement doit agir maintenant, avant qu'il ne soit trop tard. Les Franco-Ontariens méritent mieux que cela.

1020

2023 ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: First of all, I want to congratulate the new Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. This minister is very compassionate and hard-working. This minister is someone who talks from the heart. I'm very excited to work with him, as a parliamentary assistant.

I also want to thank and congratulate the new Associate Minister of Housing on her new role.

The 2023 budget is resonating in my riding of Markham–Thornhill; it was very well received.

My constituents at the Armadale seniors club, the Tamil seniors association, Box Grove seniors wellness club, and Greensborough and Middlefield seniors wellness clubs in Markham are all very happy with the budget and are commending the changes to expand the eligibility for the GAINS program—Guaranteed Annual Income System—for seniors.

The minister for seniors is right beside me. Thank you, Minister—the GAINS program for seniors is important news.

My constituents like Ms. Cho appreciate the increase in the ODSP benefits by our government.

Parents and students are also both very happy to know that, through the targeted math supports, an additional \$12.6-million investment is provided. It will double the number of math coaches who will be responsible for implementing the early intervention strategy for better understanding math concepts.

MARCEL CHARRON

MPP Jamie West: Today I want to talk about my friend Marcel Charron.

Marce was a mill operator at Glencore back when it was called Falconbridge. He worked on the floor at a blue-collar job. He was the sort of guy who was friendly and quiet. He was definitely funny. He was proud to be blue-collar, but he wasn't a stereotype. Marcel spoke openly about the horrors of femicide and the damage it does to community. His sister, Chantal, was murdered by an ex-boyfriend, and Marce shared his pain, hopeful that it would help, hopeful that it would lead to change.

Most people knew Marcel as someone who believed in workers. He spoke for workers. He stood for workers. He simply wanted a better world for everyone. His activism got him more involved with his union, and in 2013 he was elected as vice-president in Mine Mill Unifor Local 598, my dad's union. Five years later, he was their president.

Unfortunately, early in his term, Marce was diagnosed with cancer. The fight with cancer was hard over the past five years—but I witnessed a love story, and I'm a sucker for a love story, and few are as beautiful as how much Cathy loved Marcel and how much he loved her right back. It's easy to be in love in the best of times, and it's beautiful to see love fight through in the worst.

Last Friday, I visited Cathy and Marcel at the Maison McCulloch Hospice. Cath said he knew he had to come, but he was mad. Marcel winked at her and said, "I'll get over it." It was the last time I'll ever see Marcel, a blue-collar worker, a vocal advocate against femicide, a worker activist, a union president, a loving father, and a loving husband.

I'll miss you, brother.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Ms. Jess Dixon: This is a brief statement about death and about gratitude.

About 17 years ago, when I was 19, I was driving to work and I was late, so I changed lanes to avoid a bus, and I rear-ended an old lady. As I said, that was 17 years ago. Most rear-endings doesn't follow the story that we did, but what ended up happening was, we sort of adopted her into our family as a bit of a grandmother figure for me. Her name was Elta, and she was from the island country of Dominica. Over the years, my mother took care of her, and that care escalated.

Elta passed away recently, and in the course of her passing, I had the opportunity to experience both the palliative care team in our area—particularly Dr. Celine Sandor—and then ultimately the incredible benefit that we have in Waterloo region of Hospice Waterloo Region.

A week before her passing, Elta was moved to Lisaard hospice. We were very worried that it would be incredibly stressful for her, but on her first day there, I came into the room, and she held my mother's hand and said, "I'm so happy." I want to tell them how thankful I am for them taking care of Elta in her years—and how grateful I am that we have them in our riding.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: On Tuesday, I was invited to a moms-and-tots tea party in the hamlet of Fairground, Norfolk county. This tea party, hosted by the Norfolk Community Help Centre, is part of a much larger picture, a bigger community initiative.

The help centre supports women in the community, largely from the Mennonite population, but also women from the Indigenous community, and, as of late, the Ukraine. The goal is often to work toward obtaining a grade 12 education while learning English as a second language.

Since the program began, 64 Low German-speaking women have graduated with their Ontario secondary school diploma.

The centre also has a partnership with Fanshawe College and the Grand Erie District School Board. Currently, 15 people of diverse backgrounds are learning QuickBooks accounting.

A moms-and-tots program allows these women to come together to improve social, emotional and general well-being. Many of the families served have between five and nine children. These vital community connections enhance independence and coping skills while raising awareness of nutrition, reproductive practices and physical activity. Other supports offered are in areas such as settlement, advocacy, prenatal and postnatal care, as well as Low German interpretation.

The supports being offered in the community continue to grow, all on a shoestring budget, all with the love of a few key people, and under the leadership of executive director Nancy Hildebrand.

Speaker, this is a small but very interesting area with many issues and needs. I look forward to working with Nancy and her team for more opportunities to assist and empower this community.

RAJASTHAN ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA

Mr. Deepak Anand: Culture gives us a sense of belonging and helps us connect to serve and celebrate while bonding for life. That is why cultural organizations like the Rajasthan Association of North America do remarkable service to the world we live in.

Started in 2007, RANA Canada has grown into a vibrant association of entrepreneurs, health care providers, lawyers, educators, and financial and IT professionals.

For the last 15 years, RANA has been promoting cultural values through community events like Holi, Gangaur, Canada Day, India Day, and Diwali.

Mr. Speaker, tough times are the test times. During COVID-19, RANA members distributed meals to the homeless and supported hospitals and local food banks with financial contributions.

RANA also provided scholarships to deserving youth, supported students with extreme financial hardships, and provided platforms to mentor local and international students to help them to better integrate, succeed and contribute to Canada.

I am pleased to share that our Mississauga-Malton community office is joining hands with RANA to organize a blood donation drive in its efforts to keep working for the good of the entire community.

Thanks to RANA members for going above and beyond the call of duty and becoming an integral part of the beautiful mosaic of Canada. You are true representatives of Ontario spirit.

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Mr. Ric Bresee: This coming Sunday, April 2, is world autism day. Many of us are aware of autism, and we recognize that autism brings with it its unique challenges

and obstacles but also strengths, skills and perspectives that enrich our communities and contribute to our collective growth.

Now we must turn our attention away from awareness towards acceptance and inclusivity. I ask that all of us here in the chamber and all in our audience embrace the diverse spectrum of human experiences by creating environments for individuals with autism to feel valued, heard and supported. Let us take it upon ourselves to learn about autism, challenge misconceptions, and break down barriers. By cultivating a culture of acceptance, we nurture the growth of individuals on the spectrum and allow them to thrive in their own unique way.

Speaker, on world autism day, let us commit to a world where awareness leads to inclusion, where understanding leads to acceptance, and where every individual, regardless of their neurological makeup, has the opportunity to contribute their talents and reach their full potential.

REPORT, CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: the post-event report 2022 on Ontario's 43rd general election from the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario.

1030

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: I want to acknowledge, in the members' gallery today, three excellent young lawyers: Richard Campbell, Stan Cummings and Sam Davies, from the firm Flaherty McCarthy LLP.

Welcome, gentlemen.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would like to welcome today to the Ontario Legislature the family of Draven Graham. With us is his father, Justin Graham; his grandparents Julie and Patrick Ritchie; Tony Stravato from the Ontario Autism Coalition; and Kyle Fitzgerald from the Alzheimer Society of Ontario.

Thank you so much for joining us today, and welcome to the Legislature.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to welcome Thomas Keys-Brasier and Sarah Keys, mom of page Helen Elizabeth Keys-Brasier. Thomas was also a page here, and he gave good advice to his sister, who is page captain today. Welcome to the Legislature.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today, the Canadian Cancer Society is at Queen's Park. I invite everybody to go at lunchtime in room 228-230. I would like to mention some of their members, starting with the cancer society patient advocates: Dylan Buskermolen, Rebecca Grundy, Anthony Henry, Andre Rose, Taaha Ijaz. There are also quite a few members of the Canadian Cancer Society attending: Dr. Stuart Edmonds, Hillary Buchan-Terrell, Rose D'Souza, Kelly Masotti, Rob Cunningham, Stephen Piazza, Ciana Van Dusen, Gari Ravishankar, Daniel Nowoselski, Julia Pereira, Sasha Frost, Kelly Wilson Cull,

Ariana Del Bianco, Elizabeth Holmes, Olivia Kulbak, Apiramy Jeyapalan, Nuala McKee, and Sonia Sheechoria.

Welcome to Queen's Park. I hope everybody will visit you at lunch.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, I'd also like to introduce the Canadian Cancer Society to the Legislature this morning. I would like to also introduce Janice Hodgson, a Canadian Cancer Society advocacy volunteer from my great riding of Newmarket–Aurora.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, it's my pleasure to welcome parents and children from Pape Avenue Junior Public School: Jaclyn Greenberg and her child Isaac Greenberg; Yue Lisa Li and her child Nathaniel Kan; Cara McCutcheon and her children Everett Trudel and Reed Trudel; Mattias Saavedra and Emme Saavedra; Daniel Miller; Amrita Takhar and her child Max Lee; Ling Teoh and her children Daniel Lam and Abigail Lam.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It is a pleasure to welcome members and directors of Rajasthan Association of North America: Pramod Mittal, Dilip Sharma, Naval Bajaj, Reeta Sachdeva, Rakesh Goenka, and President Rashi Bajaj.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

QUESTION PERIOD

COST OF LIVING

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, there is no better place to live than in Ontario. It's one of the reasons I came here from Newfoundland so many years ago and why I chose to stay to raise a family here.

Ontario has always held great promise and great opportunity. But there's a really growing sense out there that things aren't quite right. People are struggling to pay rent and keep food on the table. Some are being forced to leave their communities or even the province just to be able to find an affordable place to live.

Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Why did his budget contain virtually no measures to help make life more affordable in this province?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'm glad to hear that the Leader of the Opposition is as optimistic about the province of Ontario as we have been since 2018. In fact, just earlier this week the opposition was continuing to talk down the province of Ontario.

But let's look at what we have done, Mr. Speaker. We didn't just start this year; we started back in 2018 to reverse what was a disastrous time frame, when both the Liberals and the NDP systematically increased the costs on the people of the province of Ontario. We started, in 2018, to cut taxes from people. We took the most vulnerable right

off the tax rolls entirely. They voted against those measures. We're continuing with the gas tax rebate; of course, they voted against that. We've reduced the costs for our small, medium and large job creators by over \$8 billion. The results have been that over 600,000 people in the province of Ontario now have the dignity of a job that they didn't when they shared power with the Liberals, and we have 300,000 jobs that still need to be filled. That's good news for the people of—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the thing is, if you're a friend to the Premier or a Conservative insider, you've got a direct line to this government, but for your average Ontarian, there's little in the way of help in this budget or anywhere else.

In just a couple of days, rent is going to come due again for millions of people in this province. Thanks to this government's massive loopholes in rent control, people are seeing a steep and sudden increase in their rent.

Back to the Premier: With people feeling so squeezed by the costs that are out of control, why didn't he use the budget to bring back real rent control and give Ontarians some relief?

Hon. Paul Calandra: How can the Leader of the Opposition talk about the costs on the people of the province of Ontario when this is a party that supports, year after year, federal policies which increase the cost of the carbon tax? Let's unpack that for a second. We've said and we have continued to say that a carbon tax will cost the people of the province of Ontario on every single thing that they do—driving to work, more expensive; going to get groceries, more expensive; the groceries that you buy in the store, more expensive, because of a carbon tax. And this is a party that supports a 14% increase in the carbon tax on April 1.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition, will she join with us in asking the federal government to, at the very least, pause that incredible increase on the costs of everything for the people of the province of Ontario? Will she put her money where her mouth is—

Interjections.

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

Members will please take their seats. Order.

Restart the clock.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It's time this government started to take a little bit of responsibility for the fact that life is a lot harder for a lot of people in this province, five years after they came to power.

I'd really encourage the Premier and all his ministers to get out of the backrooms and start listening to real people, because people are really struggling, and I hear it everywhere I go.

It's not just rent that's through the roof; it's more expensive than ever before to buy a home. This government's plan to build luxury homes on protected land is not going to solve that problem.

Speaker, my question to the Premier is, will he act to end greedy land speculation and make sure the dream of truly affordable home ownership is no longer out of reach?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, when we, in our first mandate, brought in transit-oriented communities to build more homes around the incredible infrastructure that we are building across the province of Ontario—and not just in Toronto, but in communities across Ontario that have GO train stations—how did the Leader of the Opposition vote? She voted against that measure. This is thousands of homes, affordable housing, for the people of the province of Ontario. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been working since day one to bring more housing to Ontario, and they have voted against every single measure.

1040

As I said last week, the opposition, the federal government—they can either support us in bringing more homes to the people of the province of Ontario, so that more people can share in the dream of home ownership. Whether it's to own a home, whether it's your first rental—more people want a share in that dream. You can either help us or simply get out of the way.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The next question.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Again, Speaker, they're totally out of touch and not listening to the people of this province.

There's a whole bunch of seniors—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Stop the clock.

I'll ask the Leader of the Opposition to take her seat.

The government side will come to order so that I can hear the member who is asking the questions.

Start the clock.

Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Let's talk about a real person. This week, CBC News shared the story of an Ontario senior who was charged almost \$9,000 in unnecessary fees for eye surgery at a private clinic, and when she started asking questions about it, the clinic threw her out. Lois Cooper is speaking out now, after hearing the Premier and Minister of Health repeat over and over and over again that patients will not have to pay more in private surgical facilities. Her experience, and that of so many others, shows that "Just trust us" isn't going to protect patients.

Speaker, to the Premier: Will this government stop the predatory upselling that is happening across this province?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

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

This government is actually making changes through Bill 60 which, if passed, will be expanding oversight and patient protection when it comes to people's health. For

some reason, the members opposite don't seem to want to expand those patient protections. They don't seem to want to support Bill 60, but I hope they will, because Bill 60 has a whole bunch of protections in it to address situations such as this.

For example, any community health centre, in the future, will have to post any uninsured charges both online and in person so people know ahead of time. They'll have to have a process for receiving and responding to patient complaints. And patients cannot be denied access to treatment if they don't purchase uninsured services. Finally, we're also expanding oversight to the Patient Ombudsman to include these new centres.

All of these things are in place to help patient protections. I would think the members opposite would support that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: What oversight? What protection? It's not there. That's not right.

Mountains of evidence show that patients have been repeatedly misled by for-profit clinics that have recommended procedures people just don't need. It's how they make a profit. This government's health act is going to do nothing to stop this, so we have proposed amendments to outlaw upselling in any form.

Speaker, to the Minister of Health: Will the minister accept the NDP's amendments to protect patients?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you again to the member opposite.

The whole point of this legislation is to change the model that was a model of independent health facilities into a model of integrated community health centres, bringing the new health centres and the old ones, 900 of which have been operating across the province for 30 years under all kinds of governments—NDP, Liberal and Conservative—to change that model to make them integrated under the auspices of Ontario Health and with direction which is centrally controlled—centralized wait-list management. This is a significant improvement. It will improve access to patient care, and this government is all about doing that—making sure patients get the care they need quickly, and making sure they get their lives back as soon as possible.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: No, Bill 60 is going to make it legal to put profits ahead of patients in this province. That's what it's going to do.

It is absolutely critical for Ontarians to believe that their government is acting in their best interest.

Ms. Cooper's experience shows us how patients will suffer under Bill 60, because private, for-profit clinics are going to upsell and cherry-pick their patients—private, for-profit clinics, some of which just happen to be major Conservative Party donors.

Speaker, to the Minister of Health: Who is making health policy in this province? Your donors? When will someone start putting people like Lois first?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you again to the member opposite.

In fact, that is what this government is doing—putting people like Lois first, putting patients in Ontario first. We know the status quo is not working, and that is why we are innovating.

There's nothing in Bill 60 which talks about any particular model of care. For example, we had the Kensington Eye Institute come in. Kensington Eye Institute would be a model that could be—under this Bill 60, they could be the kind of place that gets established. Kensington Eye Clinic has been giving great care to patients for many years and will continue to do so. So we can continue to build out models, make sure that they are serving patients, and make sure patients are getting the care they need, in a timely way, from the best possible experts who can provide that care. That is what Bill 60 is about—patient access, quickly.

SERVICES FOR SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The Olde Forge Community Resource Centre in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean provides crucial supports to seniors and people living with disabilities that allow them to lead healthy, independent lives and stay out of the hospital. They've been trying to survive on 2012 funding levels, while demand for services is going up. They begged this government for a budget increase, but to no avail. Now, starting on Monday, 95 seniors and people with disabilities will go without services because of this government's inaction.

Why is the Premier willing to let such vulnerable people lose such vital supports?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply on behalf of the government, the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, it's just the opposite: Since this government has been in place, we have been systematically revamping our services for not only our seniors, but for our most vulnerable across the province. That is why we started off by ensuring that the lowest-income-earning people were removed from the tax rolls altogether.

When you look at the improvements that the minister is making with respect to senior care, not only in this current budget, where we increased access to the guaranteed income supplement—the incredible investments that we are making in home care, the investments that we are making in long-term care.

We've also heard from our seniors that they also want the opportunity, where they can, to participate in the growing economy. The Minister of Labour is making that available to them, as well. The Minister of Education, through COVID, ensured that those seniors—retired teachers, for instance—who wanted to come back and help us through the pandemic could do that.

So it's more than just looking at seniors as exiting the workforce, it's more than looking at them as exiting their time to participate; it's about how we can integrate them

into helping us continue to build an Ontario that they left us—a thriving Ontario that they almost destroyed.

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

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I'm sure the seniors in the dementia day program that's being cut will be really happy to know this government is willing to let them work.

Speaker, it's not just the Olde Forge; 30 community social service organizations in eastern Ontario are faced with the same challenge and will have to make cuts, thanks to this government's decisions. Hospital CEOs in eastern Ontario called on the Premier to support these organizations because they know that these organizations keep people out of hospitals, with preventive health care, and help people get home sooner, with Meals on Wheels and home care. Just \$7 million would allow these organizations to maintain their service levels.

Will the Premier listen to the hospital CEOs and properly fund these organizations?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the opposition now talking about supporting the hospital CEOs. It's just another example of “say one thing when the camera is on, and do something else.”

When the hospital CEOs, in September, asked us to do more to help those seniors in hospitals who needed to be in long-term care or other options, the opposition suggested that people would be sent thousands of miles away and that they would be bankrupted by the policies that the hospital CEOs asked for. And what happened? In fact, just the opposite. When I tour long-term-care homes, the residents there say it's the best thing that ever happened. The quality of care is much better. Why? Because we listened to the hospital CEOs.

When the hospital CEOs told us that we had to do better on small and medium-sized hospitals' budgets, we did that.

When the hospital CEOs in Ontario—in eastern Ontario and Ottawa and Niagara—said we needed new hospitals, we came through.

When they said that they needed more staff, the Minister of Colleges and Universities came through with a program that is hiring thousands of nurses. When they needed more doctors, the minister of the Treasury Board—

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

1050

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question is for the Minister of Education.

As we know, rising inflation costs continue to impact the financial well-being of families and businesses across the province and, certainly, in the riding of Barrie—Innisfil. The upcoming increase in the carbon tax of 14% will also hinder those families. I've heard resoundingly throughout the riding of Barrie—Innisfil that they can't afford the rising cost of inflation or the increased carbon tax on April 1. They're happy to see that our government is doing what

we can to keep costs low and, of course, to fight the federal government on the tax increase—and what I'm also hearing is hope from parents that finally they're seeing direct supports for them through this government.

I was speaking to Melissa, a mom of three, who's benefiting from catch-up payments.

I want to ask the Minister of Education: What else is he hearing from parents in terms of the direct financial supports this government is giving to families and students?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I want to thank the member from Barrie–Innisfil for her leadership in this House and for standing up for families against the aggressive federal Liberal carbon tax that is raising the costs on all families and all small businesses in this economy.

In addition to opposing that carbon tax by the federal government, we are also providing direct financial relief to parents. In fact, we have done it three times—\$1.9 billion over the past three years in direct financial relief to parents, to help support them and their kids getting back on track.

We just unveiled Ontario's catch-up payments. I'm proud to confirm that 80% of parents have signed up for this \$200 payment for every child under 18 and \$250 for every child with special education needs—now, there is still 20% of parents who haven't, and I'm encouraging all members to promote this investment: ontario.ca/catchuppayments. Apply today; get the relief families deserve.

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I want to thank the minister for really understanding the needs of families and students alike.

We know, following many years of disruption, that our students returned to the classroom in person, where we know they can best recover their academic, mental and physical health. But our students also need the right investments and supports in order to realize their recovery and prepare them for success in the modern economy. This means ensuring our students are learning critical skills and job skills that are rooted in the fundamentals and topics like math, reading and writing—something we hear a lot from parents. Ontario students need these skills to find lifelong careers and help us continue to grow our provincial economy.

I want to ask the minister, with all the work he's also doing, how is he investing in our students so that they can be successful in the classroom and for years beyond the classroom?

Hon. Stephen Lecce: I do appreciate this question.

In budget 2023, we've reaffirmed our commitment to publicly funded schools. We increased investments for Ontario children by \$2.3 billion overall, even on a baseline evaluation. It's up \$1.3 billion from the year prior.

Mr. Speaker, we know there's more to do. It's why we launched a tutoring program—\$175 million focused on getting back to the fundamentals and the basics of education, lifting up reading, writing and math skills, and refocusing the system back on strengthening skills and

development in our school system. We have a modern curriculum mandating financial literacy and coding and transferrable hands-on learning that we know is critical for these young people to succeed in the economy.

Finally, we're expanding the skilled trades and technology opportunities—requiring students to now take a tech course, starting next September, opening up their horizons and their opportunities to get good-paying jobs in this economy.

MISSING PERSONS

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier.

Over 98,000 people have signed online petitions calling for a vulnerable persons alert. Today I'm joined by the family of Draven Graham, the Ontario Autism Coalition, and the Alzheimer's Society of Ontario, who came here to support Bill 74. Bill 74, if passed, would provide police forces with an additional tool to bring home our vulnerable loved ones who go missing. Time is critical in these situations, and a vulnerable persons alert would provide a useful solution to help protect people.

Currently, Bill 74 has been referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. Can the Premier provide us with a date on when this bill will be studied before the committee?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I thank the member for the question.

As she acknowledged this morning in her news conference with the parents and the grandparents, the bill that was presented to the House is significantly flawed, and had it gone to second reading today, we would not have been able to make the changes that the member herself suggests need to be made in order to make the bill effective. That is why we took the unusual and aggressive step, given that there is broad-based support for this, to send it directly to committee, so that the changes the member herself acknowledges need to be made could actually be made and the bill could be supported. I did communicate this to the member and the opposition House leader on the day we took that step to move it directly to committee.

Again, it is our intention to do everything possible to make a flawed bill—although one that is presented, I suspect, in an honest, good spirit—better so that it actually works for the parents of those who are here today and all those who are watching and want us to make an appropriate change.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the government House leader for that answer.

Bill 74 looks to fill a gap in our current emergency alert system. Speaker, did you know that six in 10 people with dementia will wander? A vulnerable persons alert could expand the demographic of vulnerable people—so the

alert would be broadened to ensure that people who wander would be brought home, and it would save lives.

Can the government House leader commit to bringing Bill 74 back from committee after changes are made, so that it can be debated and passed into legislation as quickly as possible?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think the member knows quite well, with respect to private members' business, that this government, in the last Parliament particularly, and in this Parliament, has been very aggressive, ensuring private members' business, when it is done in an appropriate fashion, when the bill is a good bill, when it does have a broad level of support on all sides of the House—that we do—

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Like mine last night—Bill 56? Really? That's really rich.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Despite the hecklings of the Liberal Party, which does not seem to want to talk about this particular bill, you have my assurances that when the bill is fixed at committee, we will bring it back to the House because, as I said, there is a broad level of support for the bill. I know the member for Sarnia–Lambton had also talked about some things that he'd like to see in this, as well. So it is our intention to do just that.

SKILLED TRADES

Mr. Billy Pang: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

Every day in Ontario, jobs go unfilled because of a shortage of workers. One senior economist recently said, "There's a traffic jam of employers looking to hire."

Information from Statistics Canada shows record-high job vacancy numbers and an unprecedented labour force participation rate.

To combat the labour shortage and maintain Ontario's economic competitive position within the global market, we need more skilled workers than ever before.

Can the minister please explain how our government is addressing our labour shortage needs?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Thank you to the member for Markham–Unionville for that very important question.

Our government knows that welcoming economic immigrants who have the skills we need is crucial to building a strong Ontario. In 2021, the Premier and I called on the federal government to double the number of immigrants we can select. I'm pleased to share that the federal government met us at the table and, together, we got it done. Our immigrant nominee program will be doubling in size, allowing us to nominate over 18,000 immigrants by 2025. Last year, we nominated 3,900 skilled trades workers, 2,200 software and IT workers, 1,000 truck drivers, and nearly 100 nurses and PSWs. Doubling this program by 2025 means we can select more workers with these skills to fill gaps in industries that need it most.

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

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you to the minister for that response. That's good news. It's welcome news that Ontario is getting a greater say in how we are addressing key labour shortages across the province through our immigrant nominee program. To support our province's economic growth and to provide a foundation for the next generation, we need to do everything we can do to get the workers our province needs.

1100

It's also necessary to highlight that our government must consider the importance of where newcomers settle and build their lives in Ontario. Urgent labour demands are present across our province, including regions outside major cities.

Can the minister please elaborate on how our government will ensure that communities in need have the ability to fill critical labour shortages?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Thank you to the member again for his leadership and for this question.

Speaker, we know that all parts of Ontario benefit from the skills and hard work of economic immigrants. That is why our immigrant nominee program prioritizes those looking to move to communities outside of the greater Toronto area. To ensure these professionals can start working as quickly as possible, budget 2023 is investing \$25 million over the next three years for security and IT upgrades.

Through our first Working for Workers Act, we removed discriminatory barriers that hold back internationally trained professionals, and we're recognizing their credentials.

Our mission is very simple: We're going to build a stronger Ontario for the next generation.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Sarah Jama: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier.

Homelessness is a disability justice issue. We've known for years that people without housing are disproportionately disabled—many with multiple health conditions.

This week, a report indicated that from June to November 2022, 22 people died in Hamilton while homeless.

Harm reduction strategies, including community mental health services, crisis supports and drug overdose supports, are all inadequately resourced.

When people end up on the street, our responses to their complex needs cannot be to criminalize homelessness and then to ignore them in death.

Mr. Speaker, the government's budget proves that they do not understand the urgency of this issue.

When will the government take real steps to end homelessness in Ontario?

Interjections.

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

To respond, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for Hamilton Centre for her first question in the House.

Speaker, there are a lot of things that the member opposite has said that I fundamentally disagree with, but there's one thing that I think she can agree with me on, and that's that we've got a great mayor in Hamilton. We've got a great mayor in Hamilton, who has signed on to our housing pledge to build 47,000 homes in the city over the next 10 years.

Again, I fundamentally disagree with her characterization of our budget. Our budget stands up for the Homelessness Prevention Program. It stands up for those wraparound services that mayors like the mayor of Hamilton have asked for. It directly responds to the big-city mayors—that includes Hamilton.

We will continue to work with mayors like Andrea Horwath on meeting our housing target moving forward.

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

Ms. Sarah Jama: We're receiving continuous reports in Hamilton that those who died had contact with the system just prior to their death. Of the 22 who died, five were seen in emergency rooms, two were discharged from hospital, three were released from jail, and four were prevented from accessing the shelter system.

This patchwork system does not work.

People are best supported in the long term when they have access to fixed, permanent housing as an important form of harm reduction. Affordable housing with full access to tenant legal protections is critically important, because it's a basic human need, and it's under the provincial jurisdiction.

Again to the Premier: People are dying. This budget won't end homelessness in Hamilton. When will the government take this problem seriously?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Housing.

Hon. Nina Tangri: It is my honour to stand up for the first time as the Associate Minister of Housing.

I'd also like to congratulate the member on her election.

All members in this House want to prevent homelessness in this province, but this is a government that has taken real action. The \$202-million investment announced in the budget has been well-received by organizations right across Ontario—"Housing is a human right and everyone deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. While we work toward that goal, the Ontario Alliance to End Homelessness is pleased to see this significant investment in homelessness services from the government of Ontario."

Speaker, I really do hope the opposition joins us and supports our investments. But do you know what? There are shovels in the ground across this province building more non-profit and affordable housing, thanks to the changes we've made under the More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022. Unfortunately, the opposition would rather tax those—

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

COST OF LIVING

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

The affordability crisis is hitting Ontario families hard. The price of everything has gone up—groceries have gone up, rents have gone up, interest rates have gone up. The price of hydro, folks, is higher than it has ever been.

Families work hard every day, and they feel like they're falling further and further behind. They're looking for something to make their lives just a little bit easier. And when they see this budget, they can't find anything to make their lives just a little bit easier—in fact, there are things that the government isn't doing in our schools and in health care that's actually making life harder for them.

Instead of making people's lives just a little bit easier, this government is actually making life harder. Just why is that?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Rick Byers: Mr. Speaker, the people of Ontario work hard, and we understand that taxpayers are under pressure. That's why we took action last year in many areas, when costs were rising—to keep costs down with the temporary gas tax cut that we confirmed in the fall economic statement made permanent, and yet the opposition voted against those both times. That's why this government is taking a targeted approach, and we're supporting people while building a strong Ontario for the future.

We're investing in Ontario's workers with an additional \$224 million to the Skills Development Fund to get workers into those well-paying jobs.

We've increased health funding \$15.3 billion over three years, and we're building 50 new hospital projects—expansions and renovations. We're doing that right now.

We have the right plan. We're taking a responsible, prudent approach to address the economic challenges and support the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, the Premier's message to families is, you're on your own. If your child has exceptional needs that aren't being met at school, guess what, folks? You're on your own. If your child is struggling with their mental health and is falling behind in class, guess what? You're on your own. If your child is on the autism spectrum, guess what, folks? You're on your own. If you're too sick to go to work, guess what, folks? You're on your own. And if you're one of the two million people in Ontario who don't have a family physician or a nurse practitioner, guess what, folks? You're on your own.

If you own lots of land in the greenbelt, guess what, folks? The Premier's got your back.

Speaker, through you: Why is this government abandoning Ontario's families in an affordability crisis?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader to reply.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Is the leader of the Liberal Party kidding me?

Let's take a look. Under the leadership or the lack thereof of the Liberals, we lost 300,000 jobs, and they wanted to transition to a service economy. In fact, Fiat Chrysler said this was the worst jurisdiction in the world in which to do business, under the Liberals—the highest amount of red tape under the Liberals, inability to get transit and transportation under the Liberals, our hospitals crumbling under the Liberals.

He talks about energy prices. Are you kidding me? Under the Liberals, people could not afford—they had to make the decision between heating and eating. And this member has the nerve to get up and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Stop the clock.

It seems somewhat strange that I can't hear the government House leader because of the heckling from the government side when the government House leader is answering the question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Start the clock.

The government House leader has a few more seconds.

1110

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, let me just say this: If the member really wants to do something about affordability then he can join us in calling on the federal government, supported by the NDP, to at least pause the 14% increase in the carbon tax hitting the people of the province of Ontario on April 1.

PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

While it is positive and welcome news that our Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program will be doubling in size to expand our workforce, we must recognize that newcomers can be exposed to the risk of exploitation at work. Human trafficking and exploitation are horrendous crimes that often go unreported. Sadly, these crimes are still happening in Canada and here in Ontario.

Trafficking exploitation exists in many forms and takes advantage of systemic issues such as poverty, inequity, employer discrimination, unsafe working conditions, and gaps in employment policy. Regardless of the cause, the outcomes are devastating, resulting in physical, psychological and emotional trauma to victims.

Can the minister please explain how our government is protecting vulnerable workers from labour exploitation?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: I thank the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for this very important question, but most of all for her leadership when it comes to anti-human trafficking in the province of Ontario.

On behalf of all MPPs, thank you for all the work that you've done.

Speaker, our government stands in support of workers, whether you are a Canadian citizen or a temporary foreign worker. We will not tolerate actions by employers who abuse workers. That is why our government introduced the Working for Workers Act, 2023, which would, if passed, continue to lead the country in providing groundbreaking protections for our workers. Part of the legislation identifies changes that are necessary to strengthen protections for vulnerable workers by establishing the highest maximum fines in Canada. Our message to dishonest and unethical employers is, "If you're going to deny someone's basic human rights by withholding their passport or essential work documents, you will face very serious consequences."

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to thank the minister for his dedication and tremendous work on this file.

The Working for Workers Act is a positive step toward cracking down on exploitation and ensuring that the rights of everyone who is working here in Ontario are protected.

However, we know from police reports that labour trafficking and abuse of vulnerable workers happens far too often. The reality is that the victims are often in precarious work situations and are afraid to come forward.

Under the strong leadership of the Premier and this minister, our government is committed to the safety, health and well-being of workers.

While Ontario needs workers to strengthen and grow our province, workers need our government to make sure they are protected.

Can the minister please elaborate on how this legislation, if passed, would implement and enforce measures to protect vulnerable workers?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Again, to the member, thank you for this question.

Speaker, for employers who abuse workers, our government holds them to account for their actions. The consequences will be swift and severe. Currently, labour inspectors can levy penalties of only \$250 for each passport or work permit that is withheld, but with the proposed changes, that will rise to \$200,000. If an individual employer is convicted by the courts of such an offence, they would also be subject to a fine of up to \$500,000, up to 12 months in jail, or both. Additionally, corporations could be fined up to \$1 million.

Through these measures, all workers in Ontario can be assured that their safety is our number one priority and that we have their backs.

HOME CARE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

Barbara Savage is 84 years old and lives in London West. She recently received a sudden and shocking diagnosis of stage 4 breast cancer and underwent a double mastectomy in February. With tubes dangling everywhere from her chest, she was discharged and told a nurse would come to her home the next day. Speaker, 11 days later, a

nurse finally came. When the tubes filled with blood, Barbara's daughter had to google how to drain them herself.

Does the Premier believe that this is an acceptable standard of home care?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

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

No, this is an unacceptable situation. This should not have happened, and I feel very badly for that person who waited 11 days for someone to come and see them.

Our government has made significant investments into home care. A strong home and community care sector is critical to our government's plan to end hallway health care and build a patient-centred, connected system. That's why a few years ago—last year, we invested an additional billion dollars to improve the quality of care and keep the people of Ontario in their homes longer with the care that they need.

We like the model at the Southlake hospital, Southlake@home, which has the home care provider meeting with the person who is going to receive the care in the hospital, so they can meet the doctor, the nurse and get the discharge papers, so that person will know that the person will be there and when. We want to make sure that that's the kind of system we have across Ontario, so people get home care which is appropriate and can stay out of hospital and get well.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, Barbara Savage's case is not unique. The revolving door of staff in private, for-profit home care agencies has left patients like Barbara on their own.

When Barbara and her daughter frantically called ParaMed, they were told no nurses were available. Thankfully, Barbara did not develop complications, but many patients do, forcing them back into the hospital.

Will this government admit that its failure to address the home care worker shortage, its refusal to drop the unconstitutional Bill 124, is putting the health of Ontarians like Barbara at risk?

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you again to the member opposite.

As this government has said many times, the only thing better than care close to home is care at home. In partnership with hospitals, primary care and our Ontario Health teams, Ontario is expanding and improving access to home and community care.

Through the 2022 budget, the government announced a plan to invest a billion dollars over three years to get more people connected to care in the comfort of their own home, but our government is now, through this budget, accelerating investments to bring funding in 2023-24 up to \$569 million, including nearly \$300 million to support contract rate increases to stabilize the home and community care workforce. This funding will also expand

home care services and improve the quality of care, making it easier and faster for people to connect to care.

Having strong home and community care for people like Barbara is a key part of this government's plan for connected and convenient care.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is for the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

The people of my riding of Niagara West have seen first-hand the devastating consequences of mental health challenges and addictions in Niagara. We've seen the losses from these challenges, and we know that the losses are devastating for loved ones and have a significant impact on our broader community.

Our government is committed to building awareness and reducing stigma related to mental health and addiction challenges. I know that through investments in community support, progress has been made, but the demand for services in my riding and so many others continues at an unprecedented rate, and our government must act to ensure that Ontarians are able to get access to the care they need, when and where they need it.

Could the associate minister please explain to this House what our government is doing to ensure that all individuals facing mental health challenges and addictions care are being supported here in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you to the fantastic member from Niagara West.

1120

This gives me an opportunity to speak about the investments that we're making in our new budget and how we're going to help those who are doing the heavy lifting in the province in the fight against opioid overdoses.

With an additional investment of \$425 million over three years, we're providing the community mental health and addictions sector its first base funding increase in 10 years. By providing a 5% increase in funding across the board for community mental health and addictions organizations, we're stabilizing the sector, ensuring staff can be retained, and making it clear to the people of Ontario that we're treating these issues with the seriousness they deserve.

I want to end the response with a quote from the CEO from CMHA, who said that the budget is "an overwhelmingly positive sign that the government understands the strain our sector is facing as we support Ontarians living with"—

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Thanks to the associate minister for that response. I appreciate hearing about the significant inflow of cash into this important sector to ensure we are able to hire more staff and address the needs of people in my community to receive the care when and where they need it. I know this is a hugely important issue and one where I'm thankful for the leadership being shown by so

many in this budget to ensure that we're funding these services in our areas.

It's also important, though, to raise awareness about the urgent need for affordable housing in the context where we are trying to support people with mental health and addictions challenges. One of the most important aspects for health for those who are recovering is ensuring that they have adequate access to housing. I know that as a government we're taking this need very seriously and we're building more affordable housing across this province.

I'm wondering if the minister can please explain what actions our government is taking to address homelessness and ensure that we're helping vulnerable Ontarians—those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Again, the continuum of care and the housing component that we need to have for it to be effective is extremely important. That's one of the key social determinants of health. We understand that, and that's why I'm so proud that our government is adding over \$200 million to the Homelessness Prevention Program to build supportive housing units across the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we're making significant, historic investments to expand mental health and addiction services across the province. At the same time, this investment demonstrates the level of our commitment to ensuring critical wraparound supports exist for those seeking treatment and recovery.

This budget is a win for all Ontarians struggling with mental health and addictions issues. We see you, and we're here fighting for you. This government is building a recovery-oriented continuum of care to meet the needs of the people of Ontario, and the investments announced last week will help ensure that those who get better stay better.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Doly Begum: Just earlier this week, a constituent of mine, Tonoy Saha, reached out. He's a student from York University. He was 30 minutes late for his exam. Despite coming early for the bus, he waited for half an hour extra, and then he was 30 minutes late for his exam.

That's just a small example of the reality in Scarborough, when it comes to transit, because of the delays we're facing. And with recent cuts to TTC bus 905 and bus 9, we'll have more overcrowding, more wait times and more delays, and it puts so many people in Scarborough at an unfair disadvantage, unlike others. This is because of the cuts that we are seeing from our government when it comes to transit.

My question is simple: What do you say to Tonoy and so many people who feel that they're at an unfair disadvantage—and the fact that we're not setting these people up for success?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for her question.

What I say to the people of her riding is that residents of Scarborough deserve the same level of transit as the rest of the city of Toronto, which is why our government has put forward a plan to have a three-stop subway in Scarborough, but that member opposite and her party voted against it.

Our government has put forward measure after measure to support transit expansion and the operation of transit in the GTA, but time after time, whether it's Safe Restart funding or whether it's capital projects for new transit in the city of Toronto, the members of the opposition consistently vote against it. They can't have it both ways. Either they're for more transit and they vote with us, or they're just against it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Doly Begum: I would like to invite the minister to come to Scarborough and walk with me, because my area that I'm talking about has six ridings, and three subway stations does not do it justice. There are members from this side and of the government side as well who are in Scarborough who could do better for their constituents.

Tonyo and many other students who wait for so many minutes, for hours for their buses, for their trains, would not be satisfied with that answer.

The experts, the advocates for transit are calling for more operating budget increase from this government. We are seeing an increase in violence in our TTC, in our transit system right now that is exacerbated because of the cuts. We need to invest and address the root causes of these problems.

My question is, will this minister and her government invest in the operating budget that was cut by the Liberals and now exacerbated by this government as well?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'm very proud of the record of our government in supporting the operation of transit systems. In fact, I don't think there has been a government in Ontario history that has done more to support the operation of transit systems.

Throughout the pandemic, under the leadership of our Premier, we put more than \$2 billion into the operation of transit systems across this province. Why? Because we know that transit is essential. During the pandemic, it was essential to getting our workers to and from home, to work safely. So we put billions of dollars. The number one beneficiary of our Safe Restart funding was the TTC.

We have been there every step of the way. But sadly for the constituents in the ridings of the members opposite, they all voted against that critical support that we provided for transit.

Mr. Speaker, we're continuing to build transit in the city of Toronto, including—

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

VETERINARY SERVICES

Mr. Mike Harris: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Animals and animal-related agriculture are crucial to the economic stability of Ontario's rural and remote communities. However, many regions across the province are experiencing a shortage of veterinarians who care for livestock, and this shortage puts a strain on the entire agricultural system. Unfortunately, there are service gaps in rural, remote and northern Ontario that put farmers and their operators at a disadvantage. These gaps create risks to farmers and their livestock, as well as jeopardizing the security of our food supply chains.

Can the minister please explain how our government is supporting veterinary care to underserved regions of this province?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I really appreciate that thoughtful question from the member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

It's important to recognize that our government understands that to keep our agri-food supply chain strong, farmers across this province need confidence in the fact that they have services when they need it and where they need it. That's why I am losing my voice—because I am talking so much about the amazing partnership that we have with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities as well as my ministry, OMAFRA.

With the support of our cabinet colleagues, we have introduced a new program. It's a collaborative program whereby the University of Guelph and Lakehead University are establishing a collaborative doctor of veterinary medicine. This is going to be a 2+2 program, where we're going to see 20 more veterinary students per year look at the first two years at Lakehead University—the follow-up two years at University of Guelph. This is an initiative that is demonstrating that—

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

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Minister.

I also want to thank my uncle Chuck Lockton, who has been a large animal vet not just here in Ontario, but also in Alberta. He was also a member of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and he has done so much great work for our farmers across this great country.

It is encouraging to see our government's commitment to funding investments that will increase enrolment in veterinary medicine programs to support Ontario's livestock farmers. The need for large animal veterinarians is pressing for many communities across our province. Therefore, it is essential that our government steps up to implement measures to recruit and retain veterinarians across Ontario.

As a government, we must do all that we can to support our farmers.

Can the minister please elaborate more on how this veterinary medicine incentive program will assist rural, remote and northern communities?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I love the opportunity to stand up and share my appreciation for everyone who has made this happen.

On Monday, we just hosted our second annual Grow Ontario Food Summit, and everybody was buzzing about

the fact that we've listened and we've taken action. But we're doing more.

1130

Over and above that collaborative partnership between Lakehead University and the University of Guelph, our PA, the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, is reviewing the vet act. And over and above the program introduced, we're making sure students are incented, so we've introduced an additional \$5-million program that's going to incent and reward people for pursuing a career in large animal veterinary medicine. This is a crisis that we've identified, and we're taking action. This particular incentive program is going to see students who are large animal vets receiving \$50,000 over five years for working in remote and underserved areas in rural and northern Ontario.

NOISE POLLUTION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Transportation.

The playground at Pape school in my riding is about to become an Ontario Line construction site—construction that will go on for two years. Parents are worried that their children, who lost two years of schooling during the pandemic, will face another lost two years unless there is adequate protection to keep noise levels in the classrooms at an acceptable level.

Will the minister direct Metrolinx to use World Health Organization standards for acceptable noise levels in the classrooms?

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I thank the member opposite for his question.

I agree; we have to make sure that all precautions are taken to preserve the safety of the playground at Pape Avenue Junior Public School, and I want to assure the parents there that my ministry is well aware of their concerns and the issues.

To date, all work around the school has focused on ground and on soil investigation, on utility locating and on surveying, but we have full confidence that Metrolinx will be able to ensure that all safety standards are followed. Metrolinx is actively working with the TDSB, with the principal of the school and the parent council to create a construction safety management plan, and it has been conducting regular site visits and safety reviews.

Mr. Speaker, a construction liaison committee—a CLC—has been created and has held two meetings to date to discuss upcoming construction activities, safety and any additional community concerns that have been raised. We are taking these concerns very seriously.

We want to make sure that the environment around the school is safe, and we will be working closely with community leaders and parents on this issue.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, the Pape parents support the construction of the Ontario Line. They're the people who have been stuck at Pape subway station, waiting, as

train after train has passed. They know that we need transit.

But, so far, Metrolinx will not make a firm commitment to the target that will be met in the classrooms so that children don't go through another two years of disruption.

What I'm asking the minister is to tell Metrolinx to set a standard that they will be held to that will trigger action if it has gone over, because the children need to have a restoration of normality. It can be done. It will require investment. But we need to have an agreed standard—World Health Organization's is the right one—to protect the children and protect the learning environment.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I'm happy to tell the parents of the Pape Avenue Junior Public School that we are following standards—we are following Ontario standards.

We have prepared a draft health and safety plan that was distributed to the CLC in advance of the last meeting, on March 28, to allow the school and attendees time to review the plan that we've put forward and to discuss it at that meeting. To further mitigate noise concerns, we've committed to placing a noise barrier around the school, and upcoming work has been detailed to the school's parent council.

I want to assure families that Metrolinx is committed to ensuring that the highest levels of safety standards are maintained throughout construction.

We all agree the Ontario Line needs to be built. It will take 28,000 cars off the road each and every day. That is essential for future generations, and we will get it done.

WOMEN'S SERVICES

Ms. Christine Hogarth: My question is for the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity.

Over the past few years, women have experienced hardship as a result of economic insecurity, a greater burden of caregiving responsibilities and, sadly, a rise in incidents of domestic violence. Combined together, these social and economic barriers are significant challenges for many women as they find their economic independence.

Women need to be able to connect to supports to develop their skills, knowledge and experiences in order to find a job or start a small business.

It's essential that our government takes action to address the unique and disproportionate barriers that women face when entering the job market.

Can the associate minister please explain how our government is supporting women, not just to gain employment, but to increase their financial security?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Thank you to the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for her question and the work she's doing to help keep women safe in Ontario.

It has been a challenging road to recovery for many women since the onset of the pandemic, but we want all women to know that we are on their side and we're not going to waver from that support for them.

That is why, earlier this week, I was proud to announce with my colleague the Minister of Labour, Immigration,

Training and Skills Development and the member from Newmarket–Aurora, that our government is expanding the Investing in Women's Futures Program. We announced 10 new locations in Ontario, and I'm excited about the continued progress that is to come.

Our government will continue to assist women who have experienced social and economic barriers, to access services, develop the skills needed to gain financial security, and live safely with a greater sense of security. This program expansion will help more women across the province access life-changing services that will put them in the driver's seat of their economic future.

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

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you to the associate minister.

I also want to thank you for coming to my riding on numerous occasions to meet with young women who are interested in the skilled trades—and what the barriers were to get them to stay in that job. They were such wonderful women. And you just were magnificent at those meetings, so thank you. All women should have access to the services they need, no matter where they live. Particularly in rural and remote communities, long distances and travel are barriers for many women to connect to the supports they need. That was one thing that was brought up in our conversations.

It's essential that there is access to services and supports for women facing economic and social barriers, including those experiencing gender-based violence and social isolation.

Mr. Speaker, our government must make investments that focus on empowering women to achieve the success they deserve through good-paying jobs.

Can the associate minister please elaborate on how this program encourages overall well-being, safety and economic independence for women?

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: Thank you again to the member.

Last month, when I toured northern Ontario, I met with women who had struggled to access much-needed services due to long-distance travel.

Mr. Speaker, women's geographic locations should not limit their access to services. It is crucial that we focus on getting the right supports in place for women who need them the most. That is why the expansion of the Investing in Women's Futures Program is particularly important for remote and rural women. The program provides a wide range of flexible services that include access to transportation, developing financial skills, and wraparound supports such as safety planning, business development and so much more. I am proud of these advancements because I know they will help many women across Ontario, including those in rural and remote areas.

I truly believe that when women succeed, Ontario succeeds.

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

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Barrie–Innisfil has a point of order.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Speaker. I'm seeking unanimous consent to have an immediate vote on the following motion respecting the carbon tax:

That, in the opinion of this House, the federal government should halt the carbon tax hike set for April 1, 2023, which will add 14.31 cents to the cost of a litre of gas, and will therefore increase the cost of everything for Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Barrie–Innisfil is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to put an immediate vote on the following motion respecting the carbon tax that—I can't even read it; I'm sorry. But I think the members heard it. Agreed? I heard some noes.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Housing has a point of order.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I'd just like to introduce my brother-in-law, sister-in-law, and nephew from the UK, from London, England: Raj Tangri, Madhu Tangri, and Kumar Tangri, along with my husband, Ashwani Tangri.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the government House leader under standing order 59.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, colleagues, thank you for another great week here at the Legislative Assembly, on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario.

On Monday, April 3, we will be seized with a motion, which will be tabled later today, with respect to bail reform. I suspect all members will want to have participation on that.

On Tuesday, April 4, in the morning, we will be dealing with a government bill, which will be introduced; in the afternoon, the budget motion; and in the evening, private members' business, Bill 82, standing in the name of the member for Scarborough Southwest.

On Wednesday, April 5, in the morning and afternoon, we will have a government bill, which will be introduced later on; and in the evening, private member's Bill 78, standing in the name of the member for Durham, Group of Seven Day Act, 2023.

And on Thursday, April 6, both in the morning and in the afternoon, there will be continued debate on a government bill, which will be introduced; and in the evening, Bill 66, standing in the name of the member from Mississauga–Lakeshore, Heart Valve Disease Awareness Act, 2023.

DOCTORS' DAY

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I understand the member from Don Valley East has a point of order.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I rise to recognize that today in Canada is national Doctors' Day. So to all the physicians who have been on the front lines of the pandemic, who continue to fight for us, I want to say that we see your efforts, we thank you and we salute you.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance concerning the budget. This matter will be debated Tuesday, following private members' public business.

DEFERRED VOTES

BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2023

LOI DE 2023 VISANT À BÂTIR UN ONTARIO FORT (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes / Projet de loi 85, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next, we have a deferred vote on a motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1143 to 1148.

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

On March 27, 2023, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

On March 29, 2023, Mr. Bouma moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of Mr. Bouma's motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Hardeman, Ernie	Rasheed, Kaleed
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Mike	Rickford, Greg
Barnes, Patrice	Hogarth, Christine	Romano, Ross
Bouma, Will	Holland, Kevin	Sabawy, Sheref
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Breese, Ric	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Byers, Rick	Khanjin, Andrea	Saunderson, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cho, Stan	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Clark, Steve	Martin, Robin	Smith, Laura
Coe, Lorne	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, Todd
Crawford, Stephen	McGregor, Graham	Surma, Kinga

Cuzzetto, Rudy
Dixon, Jess
Downey, Doug
Fedeli, Victor
Ford, Michael D.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn
Ghamari, Goldie
Gill, Parm
Grewal, Hardeep Singh

McNaughton, Monte
Mulroney, Caroline
Oosterhoff, Sam
Pang, Billy
Parsa, Michael
Piccini, David
Pierre, Natalie
Pirie, George
Quinn, Nolan

Tangri, Nina
Thanigasalam, Vijay
Thompson, Lisa M.
Tibollo, Michael A.
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Wai, Daisy
Williams, Charmaine A.
Yakubski, John

Fedeli, Victor
Ford, Michael D.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn
Ghamari, Goldie
Gill, Parm
Grewal, Hardeep Singh

Pang, Billy
Parsa, Michael
Piccini, David
Pierre, Natalie
Pirie, George
Quinn, Nolan

Tibollo, Michael A.
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Wai, Daisy
Williams, Charmaine A.
Yakubski, John

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to Mr. Bouma's motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Andrew, Jill
Armstrong, Teresa J.
Begum, Doly
Bell, Jessica
Bourgouin, Guy
Bowman, Stephanie
Burch, Jeff
Fife, Catherine
Fraser, John
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne

Gélinas, France
Glover, Chris
Gretzky, Lisa
Hsu, Ted
Hunter, Mitzie
Jama, Sarah
Karpoche, Bhutla
Kernaghan, Terence
Mamakwa, Sol
McMahon, Mary-Margaret
Pasma, Chandra

Sattler, Peggy
Schreiner, Mike
Shamji, Adil
Shaw, Sandy
Shaw, Sandy
Stiles, Marit
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Vaugeois, Lise
West, Jamie

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 65; the nays are 32.

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

Mr. Bethlenfalvy has moved second reading of Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

All those in favour the motion will please "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This is another five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1152 to 1153.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On March 27, 2023, Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak
Bailey, Robert
Barnes, Patrice
Bouma, Will
Brady, Bobbi Ann
Bresee, Ric
Byers, Rick
Calandra, Paul
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon
Cho, Stan
Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
Crawford, Stephen
Cuzzetto, Rudy
Dixon, Jess
Downey, Doug

Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Mike
Hogarth, Christine
Holland, Kevin
Jordan, John
Kanapathi, Logan
Khanjin, Andrea
Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia
Leardi, Anthony
Lecce, Stephen
Martin, Robin
McCarthy, Todd J.
McGregor, Graham
McNaughton, Monte
Mulroney, Caroline
Oosterhoff, Sam

Rasheed, Kaleed
Rickford, Greg
Romano, Ross
Sabawy, Sheref
Sandhu, Amarjot
Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Saunderson, Brian
Scott, Laurie
Smith, David
Smith, Graydon
Smith, Laura
Smith, Todd
Surma, Kinga
Tangri, Nina
Thanigasalam, Vijay
Thompson, Lisa M.

Nays

Andrew, Jill
Armstrong, Teresa J.
Begum, Doly
Bell, Jessica
Bourgouin, Guy
Bowman, Stephanie
Burch, Jeff
Fife, Catherine
Fraser, John
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne

Gélinas, France
Glover, Chris
Gretzky, Lisa
Hsu, Ted
Jama, Sarah
Karpoche, Bhutla
Kernaghan, Terence
Mamakwa, Sol
McMahon, Mary-Margaret
Pasma, Chandra
Sattler, Peggy

Schreiner, Mike
Shamji, Adil
Shaw, Sandy
Stiles, Marit
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Vaugeois, Lise
West, Jamie

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 65; the nays are 31.

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'll refer it to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is therefore referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

FEWER FLOODS, SAFER ONTARIO ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 VISANT À RÉDUIRE LES INONDATIONS ET ACCROÎTRE LA SÉCURITÉ EN ONTARIO

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

Bill 56, An Act to proclaim Flooding Awareness Week and to promote public awareness of flooding issues /
Projet de loi 56, Loi proclamant la Semaine de la sensibilisation aux inondations et visant à sensibiliser le public aux enjeux qui leur sont liés.

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

The division bells rang from 1156 to 1157.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On March 29, 2023, Ms. McMahon moved second reading of Bill 56, An Act to proclaim Flooding Awareness Week and to promote public awareness of flooding issues.

All those in favour will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Andrew, Jill	Gates, Wayne	Pasma, Chandra
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy
Begum, Doly	Glover, Chris	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Gretzky, Lisa	Shamji, Adil
Bourgouin, Guy	Hsu, Ted	Shaw, Sandy
Bowman, Stephanie	Hunter, Mitzie	Stiles, Marit
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Jama, Sarah	Tabuns, Peter
Burch, Jeff	Karpoche, Bhutila	Taylor, Monique
Fife, Catherine	Kernaghan, Terence	Vanthof, John
Fraser, John	Mamakwa, Sol	Vaugeois, Lise
French, Jennifer K.	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	West, Jamie

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

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Rickford, Greg
Bailey, Robert	Hogarth, Christine	Romano, Ross
Barnes, Patrice	Holland, Kevin	Sabawy, Sheref
Bouma, Will	Jordan, John	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bresee, Ric	Kanapathi, Logan	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Byers, Rick	Khanjin, Andrea	Saunderson, Brian
Calandra, Paul	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Scott, Laurie
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, David
Cho, Stan	Lecce, Stephen	Smith, Graydon
Clark, Steve	Martin, Robin	Smith, Laura
Coe, Lorne	McCarthy, Todd J.	Smith, Todd
Crawford, Stephen	McGregor, Graham	Surma, Kinga
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McNaughton, Monte	Tangri, Nina
Dixon, Jess	Mulroney, Caroline	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Downey, Doug	Oosterhoff, Sam	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	Pang, Billy	Tibollo, Michael A.
Ford, Michael D.	Parsa, Michael	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Piccini, David	Wai, Daisy
Ghamari, Goldie	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.
Gill, Parm	Pirie, George	Yakabuski, John
Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Quinn, Nolan	
Hardeman, Ernie	Rasheed, Kaleed	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 33; the nays are 64.

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

Second reading negated.

WORKING FOR WORKERS ACT, 2023

LOI DE 2023 VISANT À OEUVRER POUR LES TRAVAILLEURS

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

Bill 79, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters / Projet de loi 79, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'emploi, le travail et d'autres questions.

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

The division bells rang from 1200 to 1201.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On March 22, 2023, Mr. McNaughton moved second reading of Bill 79, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to employment and labour and other matters.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Gretzky, Lisa	Rasheed, Kaleed
Andrew, Jill	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Rickford, Greg
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Romano, Ross
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Mike	Sabawy, Sheref
Barnes, Patrice	Hogarth, Christine	Sandhu, Amarjot
Begum, Doly	Holland, Kevin	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Bell, Jessica	Hsu, Ted	Sattler, Peggy
Bouma, Will	Hunter, Mitzie	Saunderson, Brian
Bourgouin, Guy	Jama, Sarah	Schreiner, Mike
Bowman, Stephanie	Jordan, John	Scott, Laurie
Brady, Bobbi Ann	Kanapathi, Logan	Shamji, Adil
Bresee, Ric	Karpoche, Bhutila	Shaw, Sandy
Burch, Jeff	Kernaghan, Terence	Smith, David
Byers, Rick	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Graydon
Calandra, Paul	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Smith, Laura
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Leardi, Anthony	Smith, Todd
Clark, Steve	Lecce, Stephen	Stiles, Marit
Coe, Lorne	Mamakwa, Sol	Surma, Kinga
Crawford, Stephen	Martin, Robin	Tabuns, Peter
Cuzzetto, Rudy	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tangri, Nina
Dixon, Jess	McGregor, Graham	Taylor, Monique
Downey, Doug	McMahon, Mary-Margaret	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fife, Catherine	Mulroney, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Ford, Michael D.	Oosterhoff, Sam	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Fraser, John	Pang, Billy	Vanthof, John
French, Jennifer K.	Parsa, Michael	Vaugeois, Lise
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Pasma, Chandra	Wai, Daisy
Gélinas, France	Piccini, David	West, Jamie
Ghamari, Goldie	Pierre, Natalie	Williams, Charmaine A.
Gill, Parm	Pirie, George	Yakabuski, John
Glover, Chris	Quinn, Nolan	

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

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 95; the nays are 0.

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?

Hon. Monte McNaughton: Speaker, the committee on finance and economic affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The bill is referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Housing.

Hon. Nina Tangri: I just have one more guest to introduce: one of my amazing volunteers from my campaign, Nancy Augustine.

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

Hon. David Piccini: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate it. I would just like to welcome to the Legislature a

councillor for the municipality of Trent Hills and a fellow Rotarian, Rob Pope. He is joined by two Rotary youth exchange students: Shay, from Trent Hills, who is going to Brazil, and Felix, who is on exchange, visiting us from Lille, France.

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

The House recessed from 1205 to 1300.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I beg to inform the House that today, the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated March 30, 2023, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 110(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ANTI-SCAB LABOUR ACT, 2023 LOI DE 2023 SUR LES BRISEURS DE GRÈVE

Madame Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 90, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 with respect to replacement workers / Projet de loi 90, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail en ce qui concerne les travailleurs suppléants.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'd like to invite the member for Nickel Belt to briefly explain her bill.

M^{me} France Gélinas: This bill is being co-sponsored by Jennifer French, MPP for Oshawa; Lisa Gretzky, MPP for Windsor West; and Jamie West, MPP for Sudbury.

The bill, the Anti-Scab Labour Act, is quite simple. I would like to mention, though, that today is the 10th anniversary of the passing of my good friend Peter Kormos. Peter Kormos presented the anti-scab legislation at every Parliament until he retired, and since he retired, I have taken over.

The bill is simple. The provisions in the bill basically prevent an employer from replacing striking or locked-out employees with replacement workers except in specific emergency situations. As simple as that: no more temporary replacement workers.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. Charmaine A. Williams: I move that the Standing Committee on Government Agencies shall not meet during its regularly scheduled meeting time on Thursday, April 6, 2023, and instead be authorized to meet on Thursday, April 13, 2023.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The associate minister has moved that the Standing Committee on Government Agencies shall not meet during its regularly scheduled meeting time on Thursday, April 6, 2023, and instead be authorized to meet on Thursday, April 13, 2023.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's my pleasure to present this petition on behalf of Lauren Robilliard of Toronto.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas current legislation does not provide access to post-adoption birth information (identifying information) to next of kin if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased;

"Whereas this barrier to accessing post-adoption birth information separates immediate family members and prohibits the children of deceased adopted people from gaining knowledge of their identity and possible Indigenous heritage;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to extend access to post-adoption birth information (identifying information) to next of kin, and/or extended next of kin, if an adult adopted person or a natural/birth parent is deceased."

I fully support this petition. I'll hand it to Mikael to deliver to the table.

TENANT PROTECTION

MPP Jill Andrew: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas demolition evictions are becoming commonplace across Ontario in the middle of an affordability crisis, this practice displaces tenants from their communities, diminishes the supply of affordable housing, causes environmental waste, contributes to the growing number of people experiencing homelessness province-wide, and disrupts the lives of fixed-income seniors, families, and low-to-middle-income tenants;

"Whereas displacing tenants from their homes has a negative effect on their livelihood, social supports, sense

of community, and mental health, the protection of housing as a human right in the middle of an affordability crisis is vital to guaranteeing their quality of life;

“Whereas development is important to build the stock of housing of Ontario, the practice of needlessly demolishing buildings is counterintuitive to this goal and does not consider the long-term ramifications for current tenants, the broader community, or the environment;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the needless demolition of rent-controlled buildings across Ontario, reinstate universal rent control, ensure rental housing replacement protections for all tenants, ensure that people are housed in the middle of an affordability crisis, and that Ontario is growing the stock of affordable housing, not destroying it.”

I couldn't agree more. Thank you to the residents of 55 Brownlow and across St. Paul's and other ridings for signing this petition. I've affixed my signature and will hand it to Ethan for tabling.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I would like to thank the families of the following public schools in my riding for this petition: Runnymede, Garden, Warren Park, Annette, Lucy McCormick, King George, Swansea, Humbercrest, Howard, Parkdale, Fern Avenue and Indian Road. These petitions were collected by the Elementary Teachers of Toronto. It reads:

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from the Elementary Teachers of Toronto to Stop the Cuts and Invest in the Schools our Students Deserve.

“Whereas the Ford government cut funding to our schools by \$800 per student during the pandemic period, and plans to cut an additional \$6 billion to our schools over the next six years;

“Whereas these massive cuts have resulted in larger class sizes, reduced special education and mental health supports and resources for our students, and neglected and unsafe buildings;

“Whereas the Financial Accountability Office reported a \$2.1-billion surplus in 2021-22, and surpluses growing to \$8.5 billion in 2027-28, demonstrating there is more than enough money to fund a robust public education system;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

—immediately reverse the cuts to our schools;

—fix the inadequate education funding formula;

—provide schools the funding to ensure the supports necessary to address the impacts of the pandemic on our students;

—make the needed investments to provide smaller class sizes, increased levels of staffing to support our students' special education, mental health, English language learner and wraparound supports needs, and safe and healthy buildings and classrooms.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my signature to it and thank all the parents and family members who have signed this petition.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Lily Clarke, from Hanmer in my riding, for these petitions.

“911 Everywhere in Ontario....”

“Whereas when we face an emergency we all know to dial 911 for help; and

“Whereas access to emergency services through 911 is not available in all regions of Ontario but most Ontarians believe that it is; and

“Whereas many Ontarians have discovered that 911 was not available while they faced an emergency; and

“Whereas all Ontarians expect and deserve access to 911 service, throughout our province;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To provide 911 emergency response everywhere in Ontario by land line or cellphone.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Mikaeel to bring it to the Clerk.

1310

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'd like to thank Kate Chung from the Accessible Housing Network for all her advocacy on this petition and making homes accessible.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas:

“—24% of Ontarians have a disability, thousands of them children...; and

“—people with disabilities have been trapped in their apartments during power disruptions;

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

“(1) Comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Ontario Human Rights Code by amending the Ontario Building Code to make universal design the mandatory standard for 100% of the units in all multi-unit housing developments; and

“(2) Require that any public funds or concessions conferred on municipalities, developers, or any other organization for new housing be exclusively for universally designed housing units; and

“(3) Require that every apartment building ... have on hand a generator capable of powering the elevators and emergency lighting in all corridors for persons with wheelchairs and mobility issues.”

Thank you so much for collecting these signatures. There are also 563 signatures online. I will be giving this petition to page Skyler.

LONG COVID

MPP Jill Andrew: This petition is entitled “Support to Ontarians living with long COVID.” The petition is,

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the impacts of long COVID are extensive and devastating, which include migraines, dizziness, vertigo, brain fog, loss of smell or taste, and mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety;

“Whereas socio-economic analyses on long COVID project significant negative impacts on the economy through its effects on the labour market, gross domestic product, as well as added costs in health care and social supports;

“Whereas 1.4 million Canadians or approximately 500,000 Ontarians are suffering the devastating health impacts of long COVID;

“Whereas adequate treatment options for those suffering from long COVID are mostly limited to private clinics and can cost as much as \$5,000 a month in order for them to continue in their day-to-day lives through gainful employment, parenting, and overall life enjoyment;

“Whereas the Ontario government has failed to properly address and support the escalating crisis of long COVID and how it is devastating the lives of an increasing number of Ontarians;

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

“To immediately allocate funding to support fair, equitable, accessible, and appropriate treatment for the complicated symptoms of long COVID and implement a cohesive and comprehensive funded support system for those suffering from the disease.”

I absolutely support this petition. I want to thank Lesley in my community of St. Paul’s for her leadership and advocacy on supports for long COVID. I have affixed my signature and I will hand it to Ryan for tabling.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Denise Levent from Val Caron in my riding for this petition.

“Occupational Exposure Limits for Diesel Emissions Underground.

“Whereas the current Ontario occupational exposure limit ... for diesel engine exhaust, 400 micrograms per cubic metre total carbon, is unsafe for underground workers;

“Whereas the best current scientific evidence as published by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists..., CAREX Canada and the Occupational Cancer Research Centre ... all recommended” that the occupational exposure limit be “based on 20 micrograms per cubic metre;

“Whereas the proposed ... elemental carbon poses an unacceptable risk for lung cancer to our highest exposed workers in the province which are underground miners;

“Whereas proposed industry limits will result in hundreds of lost lives, undue harm in our communities and

incalculable financial loss due to our health care and WSIB systems;

They “petition the Legislative Assembly ... to lower the occupational exposure limit for diesel emissions to a safe limit of 20 micrograms per cubic metre for all underground workers in Ontario.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Evelyn to bring it to the Clerk.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I table this petition and stand in solidarity with the tenants of 55 Brownlow and also tenants from all buildings in Toronto that are soon to be demovicted. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas demolition evictions are becoming commonplace across Ontario in the middle of an affordability crisis, this practice displaces tenants from their communities, diminishes the supply of affordable housing, causes environmental waste, contributes to the growing number of people experiencing homelessness province-wide, and disrupts the lives of fixed-income seniors, families, and low-to-middle-income tenants;

“Whereas displacing tenants from their homes has a negative impact on their livelihood, social supports, sense of community, and mental health, the protection of housing as a human right in the middle of an affordability crisis is vital to guaranteeing their quality of life;

“Whereas development is important to build the stock of housing in Ontario, the practice of needlessly demolishing buildings is counterintuitive to this goal and does not consider the long-term ramifications for current tenants, the broader community, or the environment;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the needless demolition of rent-controlled buildings across Ontario, reinstate universal rent control, ensure rental housing replacement protections for all tenants, ensure that people are housed in the middle of an affordable crisis, and that Ontario is growing the stock of affordable housing, not destroying it.”

I couldn’t agree more with this petition and affix my signature to it.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Doly Begum: I’m very pleased to read this petition to the House. It is entitled “Enhancing Public Transit Accessibility.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas access to public transit is essential for Ontarians to be able to work, go to school, and for their day-to-day activities;

“Whereas youth, seniors, and families across Ontario rely on public transit to access basic necessities such as groceries, health care, recreation, and more;

“Whereas people living with disabilities face immense accessibility barriers, physical and otherwise, when accessing public transit;

“Whereas there are public transit stations across the province, including in the GTA, that are not equipped with facilities that allow people living with disabilities to be able to reach the trains, bus bays, streetcars, LRT, etc., without leaving the premises;

“Whereas transit agencies such as TTC have begun the work to ensure accessibility on transit vehicles and some stations, there are many stations across the city, as well as stations operated by various transit agencies across the province, that need to continue adding and enhancing accessibility features to ensure transit access for all Ontarians;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 82, Enhancing Public Transit Accessibility Act, 2023, and ensure that Ontarians living with disabilities or who have accessibility needs can use public transit.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to the Clerk through Mikael.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mary Lubitz from Val Caron in my riding for this petition.

“Make Highway 144 at Marina Road Safe....”

“Whereas residents of Levack, Onaping and Cartier, as well as individuals who travel Highway 144, are concerned about the safety of a stretch of Highway 144 in the vicinity of Marina Road and would like to prevent further accidents and fatalities; and

“Whereas three more accidents occurred in ... 2021” and another four accidents occurred in 2022 “resulting in severe injuries, diesel fuel spilling into the waterways, the closure of Highway 144 for several hours delaying traffic and stranding residents; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has completed a review of this stretch of Highway 144, has made some improvements and has committed to re-evaluate and ensure the highway is safe;

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: “that the Ministry of Transportation review Highway 144 at Marina Road immediately and commit to making it safe, as soon as possible....”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my page Paul to bring it to the Clerk.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The time for petitions has ended.

1320

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2023 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L’ONTARIO DE 2023

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 30, 2023, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): I recognize the member from Durham.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Continuing with the debate on the budgetary policy of this government and specifically Bill 85: Because of inflation and higher interest rates, now is not the time for doubling down on failed policies which we saw in Ontario from 2004 to 2018 and which we see at the federal level.

The proposed budget we have tabled, Speaker, is an opportunity for the other levels of government, federal and municipal, to work with us on priorities that matter most to families and businesses. We have proposed a financial blueprint to address the ongoing housing affordability crisis, and we welcome co-operation and input from municipalities and the federal government. This will enable us to build new homes, invest in green spaces and infrastructure and defer the harmonized sales tax on all new large-scale purpose-built projects.

Speaker, we are building on what we have already done to make Ontario a global manufacturer and to bring investments and jobs back to Ontario. As outlined in the budget speech of the Minister of Finance, our government is proposing a new Ontario-made manufacturing tax credit. This would help local manufacturing companies invest and expand so that their essential products are made right here in Ontario. Our government is following through on our plans to attract electric vehicle supply chain investments to Ontario, thus making Ontario a leading jurisdiction to build the cars of the future. Our government is making these investments because our budget is about investing in people. Ontario’s future is about investing in families and businesses. We are getting it done.

Suffice it to say, Speaker, we are disappointed that the federal government has chosen neither to address nor invest in the Ring of Fire, given the absence of any reference to the Ring of Fire in Tuesday’s federal budget speech. This is a missed opportunity for workers and for families, especially those living in northern Ontario and in Indigenous communities. Our government recognizes the need to grow our electric vehicle and battery supply chains. We want to work with our federal partners to unlock the full economic potential of Ontario’s abundant supply of critical minerals and the Ring of Fire. This does not appear to be a priority for the federal Liberal government, and that is disappointing. However, it is a priority for our Ontario PC government. Our priority is people, and this budget will help families and businesses in Ontario thrive and grow, both today and tomorrow.

What I am most proud of is that our government has a solid fiscal plan to balance Ontario’s budget while allowing for increased spending in health care, infrastructure, education and social services. Our government’s fiscal blueprint will see a smaller-than-forecasted deficit of \$2.2 billion this year; for next year, a \$1.3-billion deficit; and a return to a balanced budget—a return to balance—with a surplus of \$200 million in the following year, 2024-25.

This fiscal prudence and stability, Speaker, provides businesses, credit rating agencies and global investors

with the confidence to invest in Ontario, because those partners understand that our government has its fiscal house in order. This fundamental is critical to Ontario's growth and success.

In contrast, Ontarians understand that the federal Liberal government's reckless spending is the pathway to disaster. Under the federal government's budget that was just announced on Tuesday, Canadians will have to shell out \$43.9 billion this year alone just paying interest on the record debt of \$1.22 trillion—yes, trillion-dollar federal debt, and the interest alone is \$43.9 billion in 2023.

The Minister of Finance mentioned during his budget speech, here in this House last week, that there would be no way that a Liberal or NDP government could deliver a fiscally balanced and prudent budget such as this. His statements are corroborated by what we have seen federally with a Liberal government backed by the NDP.

While the federal government is preparing to give raises to the Prime Minister, the federal cabinet ministers and backbench MPs effective April 1, our government is choosing to invest in people. And while the Prime Minister is set to receive a \$10,300 annual salary raise effective April 1, our government will temporarily double the Guaranteed Annual Income System, or GAINS payment, for eligible seniors until the end of 2023.

Speaker, while 27 members of the federal cabinet are set to receive a \$7,800 increase in their pay this year, our government will expand the GAINS program starting in July 2024, to allow for an additional 100,000 eligible seniors to be added to the program.

While 115 Liberal backbench MPs will receive a \$5,100 increase in their pay, our government will invest an additional \$202 million each year in supportive housing and homelessness programs in Ontario.

People come first. Our citizens come first with this Ontario government.

When the federal Finance Minister, in her speech earlier this week, stated that the feds would focus on "targeted inflation relief," I assume that that minister was referring to members of the federal Liberal government and other Liberal elites. In contrast, our Ontario Progressive Conservative government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is delivering a budget which is for all of the citizens. Speaker, to respond to the opposition that we are not investing in public services, allow me to address how our budget improves public services by making it more convenient and faster for Ontarians to access them.

Our government is investing more in health care to reduce wait-lists and provide better outcomes and to add more family doctors. These investments and improvements will connect Ontarians to more convenient care through their OHIP cards.

In this budget, our government announced it will invest \$1 billion over three years so that more people are connected to care in the comfort of their own homes and in their communities.

Our government is providing an additional \$425 million over three years for mental health and addictions,

including a 5% increase in the base funding of community-based mental health and addictions service providers.

We are funding an additional \$80 million over the next three years to further expand enrolment for nursing programs.

Speaker, we're getting these things done because we're building Ontario, creating the environment for a prosperous Ontario, and that is how we can afford to both balance the budget in the near future while investing, in a record-setting way, in the essential services our fellow citizens expect to rely upon.

Unlike the federal Liberals, who are blind to the needs and the extreme high costs and demands on their citizens, we are investing in services for our citizens. Our government has presented to the people of Ontario a responsible, transparent and common-sense budget that will support families, will support workers and help businesses to succeed across Ontario.

1330

Our government believes in a strong and resilient Ontario because it is the people of Ontario that make it so. I therefore urge the opposition and, indeed, all members of this House to pass this budget, to confirm and affirm the budgetary policy of this government, because we owe it to our children and our grandchildren to invest responsibly in their future today to ensure we have a prosperous Ontario of tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Richmond Hill.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I'm happy to join the member from Durham to support the budget motion. This budget is all about building the future of a strong Ontario. Like the rest of the world, Ontario continues to face economic challenges. However, despite this uncertainty, our economy remains resilient. The budget is a responsible, targeted approach to help people and businesses today while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations.

Last Friday, when I was back in my riding of Richmond Hill, I received many phone calls giving me their thumbs up to our plan. One of my constituents, Amy, shared her excitement: "This is really a long-term plan. I see the future of Ontario and a bright future for our next generation." I am so encouraged by her comments, and she is totally right.

Due to the government's thoughtful, transparent planning, we have a path to balance the budget while still investing in health care, supporting seniors and building more homes. The budget continues heavy investments in infrastructure, with more than \$20 billion in highways, hospitals and transit projects. We are also providing boosts to home care and the health care workforce.

Speaker, our government is building a strong Ontario by attracting and protecting investments and jobs. We are investing in hospitals, schools, transit, highways and other infrastructure projects. We are working to manage today's challenges, train workers and provide connected and convenient health care and better public services. We have the right plan that is building an Ontario that we can all be proud of, not only today but in the future—an Ontario that

continues to have a resilient economy, an Ontario that is strong.

Even though we are making investments into more health care, more housing, more highways, more transit, more skilled trades, more new manufacturing, more development in the north, we are still able to shrink the deficit of the 2022-23 fiscal year to \$2.2 billion. We will further reduce the deficit to \$1.3 billion in 2023-24, with a modest surplus of \$200 million in the following year. My member just now has already covered all these things, but I still want to share this excitement.

All these are made possible because we worked hard in developing our economy. We successfully attracted over \$16 billion in investments from the global automakers, from Ford to Toyota, GM to Volkswagen. Ontario is the global leader in electronic vehicle and battery manufacturing now.

Madam Speaker, our government is building Ontario for today and tomorrow by driving economic growth, lowering the cost of doing business, attracting new investments and getting key infrastructure built faster. The budget is proposing a tax credit that would lower the cost of investing in Ontario for the local manufacturers who are looking to grow and expand.

We are also unlocking the potential of northern Ontario by committing \$1 billion to build the road to the Ring of Fire and other crucial infrastructure that will connect the rich mineral deposits in the north with Ontario's world-class manufacturing sector.

Ontario is investing an additional \$3 million this year and \$3 million next year into a program that helps junior mining companies finance mineral exploration and development. The investments build on the government's minerals strategy which aims to grow the sector and make Ontario a leading producer of critical minerals, including those in the Ring of Fire in the province's north. Critical minerals are essential for products Ontarians rely on, like cell phones, electric vehicles and semiconductors in goods.

Madam Speaker, to build a stronger Ontario that works for everyone, we need to welcome more economic immigrants with the skills we need, especially in the skilled trades and health care. Ontario is facing a labour shortage with nearly 300,000 jobs unfilled, and it is critical to ensure that we have the resources to select and welcome those best placed to succeed, building stronger communities for everyone.

As part of the 2023 budget, our government is investing an additional \$25 million over three years in our Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. This investment will speed up processing and ensure those coming to Ontario can start working in their professions quickly. In the meantime, our government is investing \$224 million to expand training centres, including union training halls and leverage private sector union expertise to train more workers in the skilled trades. Ontario needs more skilled workers.

Our government is also doing a lot to lower the cost of living. The member has just covered a lot of what we are doing to lower the cost of living. All I can say is we have a strong outlook for Ontario. I share the finance

minister's quote, "Our government is now bringing the cars of tomorrow, the jobs of tomorrow and the investments of tomorrow."

Thank you very much. I'm so looking forward to support from everybody in this House. Let's build a strong Ontario together.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the remarks from the member from Durham and he opened them with, "Now is not the time to double down on policies that do not work."

I'd like to remind the House that this government introduced Bill 124, capped public service wages at 1%, drove health care workers out of the sector, and they're being rehired by agencies and going back into the hospitals and long-term-care homes for twice as much money. This bill was ruled unconstitutional, yet this government is now appealing it, effectively doubling down on a policy that doesn't work. My question to the member for Durham is, why?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you to the member opposite for the question. This is a budget that balances the competing concerns we face. This is a budget that is thoughtful, transparent and forward-thinking.

Fundamentally, what His Majesty's loyal opposition fails to understand—both at the federal level, supporting the federal Liberal government, and in opposing this budget—is that when we tax and spend, we drive jobs out. The answer is to reduce taxes, create the environment for prosperity for businesses, particularly small businesses, to invest in people, so that when we have prosperity, we have the funding for the public services we—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you. Further questions?

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Durham for eloquently talking about the federal budget and federal numbers. It's scary. Staggering numbers are coming out in the federal budget. The debt alone—he was talking about \$1.22 trillion and the interest on the debt they have to pay every year—Canadians, not they have to pay; Canadian taxpayers had to pay \$43 billion. The numbers are staggering. We are mortgaging our country to generations to come, Madam Speaker. Could you elaborate on that number, that very staggering number?

1340

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you to the member, who I understand plans to support this budget, wisely. The federal budget—the federal debt and deficit are out of control. Not only is it \$1.22 trillion, a record debt, most of which was piled on just in the last few years—interestingly enough, the former federal finance minister, Bill Morneau, clearly objected to what direction that Liberal government was going in, supported by the NDP. He has written about it in his book. He left because he didn't agree with that being the pathway forward, and that is now leading, as I said, to \$49.3 billion in annual interest payments that the Canadian people will be saddled with.

We are going in a different direction. We have a path to balance, and that is where we are headed, while making sure we have investments to create a prosperous Ontario, which in turn funds the public services that we all rely upon. That is the Progressive Conservative way.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Doly Begum: I listened to both the member from Durham and the member from Richmond Hill asking for support for this legislation, and one of the things I'm really concerned about, Speaker, is the crisis in our housing across this province. Not only can't people rent, but people are seeing the high mortgage payments and the increasing property taxes. We're seeing this is going to happen in Toronto, as well.

How do you justify the cut by your government of \$124.4 million in this budget to municipal affairs?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: We all agree, I understand, that there is a housing crisis in the province of Ontario. That is why we continue to move forward with the tabling of bills that will create the environment for the building of 1.5 million new homes. Not one-size-fits-all; many types of homes: purpose-built rental homes; non-profit homes; yes, single-family homes; and homes in areas, for example, around the Bowmanville GO train, yet to be built, where we have condominiums and townhouses. Gentle intensification: That is the plan.

But homes don't get built by the government. They don't get built by themselves. They get built when a government such as ours creates the environment where it happens, where we unleash the potential to address the issue, and that is what we're doing.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to thank the member for his discourse, and I want to say that the citizens of the riding of Essex are very excited, because this budget makes another reference to the regional hospital that's being constructed that's going to serve my citizens in the riding of Essex. Also, my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh here is very excited, along with the citizens in Windsor–Tecumseh, because this budget continues the commitment to build the regional hospital in Windsor–Tecumseh that's going to serve our whole region.

And so my question to the member is, in addition to this fantastic investment for Essex and Windsor–Tecumseh, what else is in this budget in regard to health care that is going to serve the citizens of the province of Ontario?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you to the member for Essex. Of course, what his question brings to the forefront is that this budget is targeted. We don't just make the general investments, but we target them so that we can see in the ridings that we represent where prosperity can come about, where the hospitals are going to be built, where the opportunity is that new schools can be built.

Then, with investments that create the pathway for Highway 413, that has a ripple effect across the province. With investments in transit, that has a ripple effect across the province. It's all about targeted investments in strategic areas across the province, but it's also about general investments.

In the area of health care, we're making it possible so that we have more nurses—thousands more nurses in well-paid positions, more PSWs, more doctors, because you can't just build hospitals; you've got to have the people, and we're investing in people.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad the member is talking about having people in communities and cities for building hospitals, building services.

As of January 12, 2023, the Kerr report has said that London was Ontario's third-fastest growing community after Kitchener–Cambridge–Waterloo and Barrie. So, I looked through the budget. Transit is a huge topic in our city and as you know, Via is no longer operating from London to Toronto. Your government started running a pilot project in October 2021 to expand GO train services to London, and I'd like to ask the member why there's nothing in the budget with respect to expanding the GO train services in London. Why did his government abandon this pilot project?

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Well, there are investments that are being made and proposed in this budget that will benefit London because, as I indicated in my answer to the question from the member for Essex, it's targeted investments in health care, in transit, in housing and all sorts of services and investments in people and professionals to get it done. That has a ripple effect across the province. When you create the environment for the building of Highway 413, when you invest in transit, in projects like the Ontario Line and GO train expansion, when you invest in those things it has a ripple effect in all areas of the province, including London.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Quick question, quick response.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: Mindful of the time, very quickly: My colleague from Durham spoke about investments in making sure that we have the right climate for business. I'm wondering if he can speak to the House about how he believes the investment in the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit will benefit our industries.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: If I may—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Durham.

Mr. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you for the question. Yes, this is a very, very important feature of the proposals in the budget. Minister Fedeli and the Minister of Finance have spoken about this. The Ontario-made manufacturing tax credit will help local manufacturing companies invest and expand. That allows their essential products to be made right here in Ontario. That's what it's about. That's what it will do.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

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

A couple of things, a couple of little statements I'll make: Our lives are not for profit. I want to make sure we know that.

But I'm going to start with the same comment I heard again this morning and again this afternoon, about the job loss in Ontario. I want to be clear about the job loss in Ontario, because I lived it, being president of Local 199. What killed the manufacturing sector in the province of Ontario was the Harper government that allowed our dollar to go to \$1.10. It was a petro dollar. It benefitted the West; we all know that. Their residents were getting paycheques and all kinds of extra stuff from the government. But in Ontario, it killed the manufacturing sector. That's what really started the problem—it was \$1.10. Why are we doing so well in Ontario today? I stood up in this House nine years ago and I said we needed an 80-cent dollar; today it's at 72 cents. People are coming here because of the cheap dollar. But the other reason why they come to Canada and why they come to Ontario is because we have a publicly funded health care system, which this government is attacking. They're trying to privatize our health care. That will be one of the benefits that will be gone. Once it's gone, it's gone forever.

The other thing I wanted to talk about, because I raise it all the time—I listen to this all the time and I don't even know how to respond to them. You say, "You guys always voted with the Liberals." Going back to 2011, 2014, most of the people around here weren't even here at that time, but that's okay. What they forget to mention is that the Conservatives were not in power, in official opposition, for 14 of those years—14. And you know what they did? They voted for the Liberals and Bill 115 that attacked workers and teachers. They voted against anti-scab, and not once. Anybody want to guess how many times you guys voted against it? Yell it out. I'll help you out then: 16—16 times, as they continue to say they stand up for workers.

1350

Last night I was fortunate enough to go watch a Leafs game. I live on Wellesley while I'm up here. I walked from Wellesley to the ACC. And while I was walking down the street, I saw exactly what Ontario is like with an affordability crisis, with a homeless crisis. You know, Madam Speaker, it brings tears to your eyes to walk from Wellesley to the ACC and see 20—20, because I counted them last night—people lying on those grates where the heat comes up, with blankets around them. That's our Ontario. Nobody here should be proud of that—nobody.

I'll get into the bill. I'll probably get into some other things, but I'll get into the bill as well. As we are talking about our health care system, there is another bill that they are bringing forward almost at the same time with the budget. It's Bill 60. But because the budget talks about health care, during the committee hearings we had a lot of unions come to present at committee, to talk about health care and where we're going in health care and the privatization of health care.

The OFL represents 1.2 million workers in the province of Ontario. You would think a government that is saying they are working for workers would consult with them. Anybody on the Conservative side know if they did? Want me to help you? They never consulted with the OFL.

SEIU came, representing workers in the province of Ontario. I asked them the same question: Were you consulted about the future of our health care? You know, Madam Speaker, what they said? "Never consulted." So the OFL and the SEIU were not consulted. I said, "Wow, that's really strange."

Then Unifor came. I said, "Well, they must have talked to Unifor." I asked the same question. I believe it was Kelly-Anne Orr, from Unifor, who was there. She said, "We weren't consulted." I said, "You weren't consulted on health care, which is probably the biggest thing, including the budget?" "No."

Then I got lucky; CUPE came. Well, CUPE would have been consulted, right? I ask my colleagues on the other side, who have got their heads down and aren't looking at me, was CUPE consulted? Not consulted.

Think about that when you're talking about a party that is trying to say "We're working for workers"; when we have a crisis in health care. We have a crisis in long-term care, where 5,500 people have now died in long-term-care facilities in the province of Ontario—78% in private long-term-care facilities. Not consulted? These are the workers that represent the nurses, the PSWs—not consulted. Whether it be in home care, retirement homes, long-term care, they didn't even consult them. You should be embarrassed by that, quite frankly, not even talking to the workers that you should be.

I'll start my speech now I guess. I chewed up a couple of minutes here. I apologize for that.

I think we came into this budget season knowing what to expect. Since the provincial election, we've seen the disregard this government has for public services, the affordability crisis in our province and the lives of our workers. They have told us the pandemic is behind us, although it's not, and we have seen the true Conservative government. It's a government that prioritizes wealthy corporations over everyday people. It's a government that works to dismantle our public health care system. It's a government that refuses to participate actively in our legal legislation. It's a government that I believe is showing its true colours.

Madam Speaker, the members across the aisle have a habit of standing up and telling us that we voted no to their bills. We said no to their ideas, but I feel that those members have a very short memory—and being fair, when I look around, I don't see anybody who might have been here during the Harris days. From 2004 to 2018, the Conservatives in opposition voted against every single budget. I want to repeat that—because we'll have the House leader and other people stand up and talk about the NDP saying no. For 14 years, you voted against every single budget, every single one. Although you did vote with the government on a couple bills: Bill 115, voted down anti-scab legislation. You did vote, but that was against labour.

What do you expect from this budget? First, I think we expected something to address the affordability crisis we face in Ontario. But we didn't get anything like that,

nothing to actually help working people make ends meet in Ontario.

Maybe I thought we'd get something similar to their gimmicks around the last election, like the licence plate stickers that didn't stick, that rebate they offered to voters. Maybe this budget would offer some discount coupons, like you get in the mail: discount, two-for-one, maybe buy-one-get-one-free eye surgery. But we didn't get the classic vote-buying gimmicks we've seen from this party before. We got a budget that didn't even try to address the affordability crisis in Ontario.

Because of that, I think it's important for us to begin talking about the affordability crisis, Madam Speaker. I want to talk about the crisis in our communities. I gave you an example of going to the Leafs game last night right here in Ontario.

I want to talk about what seniors are facing when it comes to home heating costs, because this is a big part of the cost-of-living crisis we have in Niagara and across the province. Natural gas prices have doubled for some families and seniors. That's not an exaggeration. The Toronto Star reported that some people's Enbridge bills have gone up from \$89 a month to \$196 a month. That's an increase of 120%.

This is affecting everyone. Families are struggling. But in particular, it's affecting families who are on low income and affecting seniors. Most seniors are on fixed income from their pensions or from Old Age Security. This is somewhere where the Conservative government could actually do something to help seniors and families who are struggling. But there's nothing in the budget around natural gas heating bills.

Madam Speaker, it isn't just home heating we see increasing. Gas is largely unaffordable. The province moved to deal with gas prices, but the budgets were limited, and the government then fearmongered during the 2018 campaign about increasing gas prices. They sat back and watched it happen.

When you fill up your tank, maybe you're happy it's not costing you \$2. But, definitely, you're seeing \$1.40, \$1.45, \$1.50 at the pump. And we know it's going to go up. Oil prices are up again today. You know what the price increase is going to look like from day to day or even within that day? In the morning, it could be \$1.39; in the afternoon it's \$1.50.

This government has the opportunity to regulate gas companies and bring transparency to the industry to help consumers, but they refused a number of times.

It may be tough to always predict what this government is going to do, but if they have an opportunity to side with the corporations, they're going to do that every time. We know that the oil companies have had record profits.

Talking about corporations, I don't think we can discuss this budget without talking about the lack of action on surging grocery prices. I'm sure you feel the same way, Madam Speaker. Do you know they're up somewhere between 13% and 17%, grocery prices? We all have to eat. Some people, in particular seniors, are having one meal a day, sometimes two meals a day. They're skipping meals. Families are doing the same thing.

The Premier, who said he would take on any corporation that was gouging Ontarians, can't seem to find the courage to take on the Weston family gouging Ontarians. I think they might be too close of friends for him to step in and say, "Hey, your company is taking advantage of an inflation crisis at the expense of hard-working people."

I always like to give examples. I do a lot of shopping up here if I go and buy my groceries. One of my favourite stores is the dollar store. I eat 14-grain bread, do it all the time. At the dollar store, it's \$3. I live where Rabba is, so I go down there sometimes if the dollar store is not open and I'll buy bread. It's \$3.49. And if I can't get to those two places, I go to Shoppers. Do you know what it is at Shoppers? It's \$4.49.

1400

Can somebody tell me—and the dollar store is exactly half a block away from the Shoppers—how it's \$3 at the dollar store and \$4.49 at Shoppers? How does that happen? That's price gouging, my friends. And this is one example. I can give you more about Kraft Dinner and all that kind of stuff that I eat, but that one's pretty clear. Some of these companies have a history of price-fixing. They've actually been caught doing it. So when you go to Loblaws and you see a pack of chicken that costs more than a ticket to a Sabres game, it's hard not to come to the conclusion that they are purposely gouging people. This government could have taken action in this budget and provided relief for families, but they didn't. They could have stood up to these corporations and addressed their clear gouging, but they didn't do that either. It was a missed opportunity for the people of the province who are paying for it.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to talk about rents. I don't know how many people here pay rent. I think somebody from the Conservatives yesterday said he was paying \$2,700 for rent in his apartment in Toronto. We know renters are really struggling right now. Across the country, asking rents have increased by 10% over the past year. Think about this, Madam Speaker: In Niagara, we have communities where the price of a two-bedroom rental has jumped over 20% since last year. As we know, in 2018, it was the government that passed a rule that allowed for unlimited rent increases in buildings and units that were created after November 2018, and again, in this budget, there's been no action on rent control. That's a mistake.

So what do you see in front of us? We are a province with an affordability crisis and a government unwilling to address it in any meaningful way. And now, we've seen them start to cut back on health care services as we move towards a private model. Madam Speaker, I would like to first talk about what this government has done to seniors, because this is really devastating. This government, under Premier Doug Ford, has reduced the OHIP-covered eye check up for seniors aged 65 and older down from once a year to 18 months. What do you think about this?

We know seniors are struggling with the cost of living. Everything I have talked about previously—rent, price of gas, price of groceries, natural gas—it's been affecting all

our seniors. So they are already struggling with making ends meet, managing their budgets on a fixed income. And what else do we know? We know that preventative care is extremely important for everyone, but particularly for seniors, and I can say that because I'm a senior. I'm proud to say that. By the way, I'm wearing glasses and I get my eyes checked once a year. Now I'm being told I've got to wait 18 months.

What else do we know? We know that preventative care is extremely important for everyone, particularly seniors. And we know that when seniors go longer without proper eye care, there can be long-term problems. It's not acceptable in one of the richest provinces in the country that we need to cut back on simple health care services like eye care.

Let's not forget the one that I haven't mentioned yet—I don't think I have. Let's not forget what we did to our seniors in long-term care. It's up to 5,500, I believe, right now, that died in long-term care.

It's hard not to look at the inadequacy in investment in health care from this budget. Long before we saw the contents of their privatization bill, we knew the plan. In early 2022, we rang the alarm bells that health care privatization was coming. How did we know that? Because we witnessed them starve the system, disrespect health care workers and turn the pandemic into a long-term health care crisis. This is standard practice for conservative governments across the world—and I say conservative with a small “c” because that includes some past Liberal governments in this province.

I don't know how many speakers—NDP speakers, Liberal speakers, independent speakers, the Green speaker—have talked about Bill 124. You know who hasn't spoken about Bill 124? The majority government. But you're working for workers? You're capping their wages at 1%. And that doesn't just include wages; that includes wages and benefits at 1% when inflation is running at 6.5% and 7.5%. And then you have the nerve to stand up and call them heroes. They're tired. They're exhausted. They're unappreciated by this government. Yet you guys continue to run into courts and fight Bill 124. You should be ashamed of yourselves, quite frankly.

They manufacture a crisis in a public service and then they turn around and tell us that the only solution is privatization, that a for-profit company is going to save the day. They call it innovation. It's not innovation. Private companies have been working to take over public services and funnel public dollars to their shareholders for many years.

In the health care sector, we're not talking a few million dollars. You know what we're talking? Billions. It's the same thing that they did in long-term care. I've said this at committee, and I was very clear on it, and I say it here: Take a look at what they did to long-term care and the end result there, where shareholders got billions and billions of dollars. Their CEOs were making hundreds of thousands of dollars sitting on boards where they might meet a couple times a year.

The ultimate thing that happened with the privatization: It wasn't about care. It wasn't about our parents, it wasn't

about our grandparents, it wasn't about our brothers and our sisters, our aunts and uncles. What was it about? Yell it out. Conservatives, yell it out: It was about profit. It was never about care. That's why we had 5,500 people die in long-term care; 3,800 of those died in private, for-profit homes. Because it wasn't about care, it was about making money.

It's hard to discuss a budget without discussing the impact it will have on workers in this province. I think it's easy for some of us in this Legislature to forget that workers move this province forward. Without them, the province doesn't function. They are our greatest asset. The government has done a lot of work to reshape their image in the eyes of workers. The 1990s under Mike Harris is hard to erase from the minds of workers, but they are trying. A few photo ops, a couple of empty bills—reassuring words to their friends in the skilled trades, all in hopes of mending that relationship. When it comes to the big things, like the budget, they revert back to their old style. They want to privatize our health care system.

I've only got a minute left, but I'm going to read at least one quote from J.P.: “Privatization makes wait times worse, not better. Our health care system is in crisis, and it's clear that privatization is not the solution. Putting private profits over people won't fix wait times or solve the recoupment and retention crisis, which is causing staff to burn out and leave their jobs. This government has manufactured a crisis in order to clear the path to privatization—Bill 60 is proof.”

I'll try and read the OFL: “Bill 60 opens the door to two-tiered care—where those who can afford to pay more receive faster service. Meanwhile, underfunded public hospitals reach capacity and underpaid, overworked health care workers face critical levels of burnout.”

I've only got four seconds left so I can't read any more, but we've got to stop agency employees charging \$150 for a nurse as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member opposite for your discussion and debate of the budget bill. I'm glad to hear that you comparison shop between the dollar store and Shoppers; that's great. I always support people who comparison shop. That's what makes competition healthy—glad to hear that.

I did want to touch on something that's coming down the pipe on April 1: The increase in the carbon tax. That's 14 cents a litre on gas. That is going to cost every consumer in this entire province. Every individual, regardless of income, it's going to cost them more to heat their home, put gas in their car, making life more unaffordable for the people of Ontario, and it's inflationary, which is not something we want. I think we all agree we need to get inflation down right now.

Will you support us in going against this carbon tax which penalizes hard-working Ontarians?

Mr. Wayne Gates: First of all, I think you missed my point when I talked about going around and seeing the price of bread. My point was about price-gouging. That's what it was about. It has been going on—

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Are they allowed to have two questions at once? Can I at least answer?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Order.

Mr. Graham McGregor: Yes or no? Are you going to support the tax? Is it a good thing or a bad thing?

1410

Mr. Wayne Gates: You done?

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Order, please.

The member for Niagara.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you. I appreciate—

Interjection.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Can I get a few seconds to at least answer his question?

The reason why I did that is because I've been arguing about price-gouging. Because where I live, in my riding—Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls and Fort Erie—we have the highest number of seniors in the entire province of Ontario, and they're coming into my office, sir, and they're crying because they can't afford to buy their food; they can't afford to heat their home; they can't afford to pay for their medication. That's what's going on in the province of Ontario. And you know what? I lose sleep over it, because these are people that have given their entire life to this beautiful province, to their family, to their grandkids, and they're breaking down in my office—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Sorry. Further questions?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: The member for Brampton North should actually apologize to the member for Niagara Falls. That's the person he was trying to shout down while he was trying to answer the question.

But my colleague talked about how last night he went for a walk and passed—I believe it was 20 people sleeping rough on the streets. That was within just a few short blocks. And I'm going to point out that here in Toronto, you can't walk a block without seeing people that are experiencing homelessness, and I think it's important to point out that those people are becoming younger and younger and younger. It's not uncommon for me to pass kids in their teens, those in their early twenties, because of the affordability crisis created by this government in this province.

But Speaker, I want to ask my colleague about health care, because he talked about that. This government is excluding those people experiencing homelessness from being able to access health care. That's their policy: They're excluding them from accessing health care. But I'd like my colleague to talk about the health care system and maybe expand more on the issues we're seeing as far as the health human resources crisis that is making it more difficult for everyone in this province to access health care.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate the question. I'll talk really quickly. I used the example of going to a Leafs game and seeing people lying on the streets trying to stay warm; they were obviously homeless. But it's not just in Toronto.

I want to be clear about that. It's right across the province. It's in every one of your ridings. Your food banks have never seen the numbers that they're seeing today. They can't keep up. So we have a crisis in that.

As far as the human resources, I can't say it enough here; I say it almost every day: Bill 124. You're fighting it in the courts. Nurses, PSWs are leaving in record numbers because of Bill 124. If you want to at least show respect at all to our heroes—because you guys call them heroes; we call them heroes as well—repeal Bill 124, and the crisis in health care in retention will go away.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. John Jordan: The member from Niagara likes to speak about long-term care, so I have a question regarding long-term care. This budget supports over 60,000 new and reconditioned long-term-care beds. Some of those:

—Crescent manor: 28 new, 68 redeveloped;

—Gilmore Lodge: 160 redeveloped;

—Niagara Long-Term Care Residence: 100 new and 124 redeveloped;

—Radiant Care Pleasant Manor: 119 new and 41 redeveloped because of this government.

This government: 60,000 new and reconditioned beds. I'd like to ask the member from Niagara how many beds he supported before 2018 in his position as MPP?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sir, I do appreciate the question, because I've always fought for long-term care and seniors in my community. All you have to you is ask, and they'll tell you.

But to your point: To stand up and have never once—your government has never once, including yourself, sir, who I sat at committee with—apologized for what happened to our seniors, to the 5,500 that died, the 3,800 who died in for-profit care. And the reason why they died there—ask the military. You brought the military in. And what did they tell you? They didn't die because they were old and they had COVID. They died from dehydration, sir. You're trying to tell me if we had the proper staffing in these homes, they wouldn't have been taken care of? They found seniors that laid in their beds for 24 hours—24 hours after they died, because they had no staff. This is in the report. This isn't coming from me.

I will always fight for seniors. I always have, matter of fact, for my entire 40 years that I've been involved in the labour movement and the 10 years I've been here. Thank you for the question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Niagara Falls on his remarks. One of the things he didn't mention that is in the budget is the end of the government's flawed paid sick leave scheme. It's almost as if this government thinks that COVID is over in this province, that Ontario workers will no longer need to stay home if they develop COVID symptoms or test positive.

I wondered if the member wanted to comment on whether that is sound fiscal policy, whether that is a sound public policy of this government to abandon paid sick days

instead of fixing paid sick days and ensuring they're available to all Ontario workers in this province.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's a great question, by the way, and thank you for all the work you've done on trying to get this government to understand how important sick days are.

I talk to a lot of employers. I go around and talk to them all the time, and you know what? Even small businesses that I talk to don't want their employees coming to work sick. They also don't want that they can't afford to buy their groceries at the end of the week if they have to take a day off or a couple of days off because they've got the flu—not necessarily COVID. There's a lot of other things that you get sick and you have to take three or four days off.

There should be sick days in the province of Ontario, without a doubt. The one thing we all have to admit is that we live in one of the richest provinces in all of Canada. Are you trying to tell me we can't afford to provide sick days for workers? Are you trying to tell us that? Come on, think about it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: As we know, youth leaving the child welfare system are at high risk of being trafficked, experiencing homelessness and developing mental health issues, and have lower high school graduation rates than their peers. As part of the child welfare redesign, this government is investing \$170 million over three years to support a new program aimed at improving long-term outcomes for youth. We're investing proactively to make sure that our youth in the child welfare system have the skills they need to achieve financial independence through life skills development, supports to pursue secondary education, training and pathways to employment.

My question is to the member opposite is, does he support this initiative?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I will talk about a great program that we had when I was in school and I lived in poverty. We had shop in grades 7 and 8. I thought that was a great idea for young people who had issues. I had a teacher who helped me and supported me, and then I took a four-year course at St. Catharines Collegiate. I was trying to think what my high school was back then. At St. Catharines Collegiate I took a four-year course, and then I was fortunate enough to go in and get a job at General Motors.

But do you know what happened to that program, sir? Do you know? I'm going to help you—you can look it up when you go home tonight. I don't think the Leafs are playing tonight; the Jays played this afternoon.

Do you know what happened to that program? It was cancelled in the schools by the Harris government. Now that we want to bring it back, I think it's great. I think we should do that because it gives a hand up to people who, like myself, are maybe less fortunate. I'm agreeing with you on your comment. How we get there, we may differ, but I think the programs going back into schools is a great idea for skilled trades.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Adil Shamji: It's an honour to rise in this august chamber, and specifically as the member for Don Valley West glares at me. I'm very pleased that I'll be sharing and splitting my time with her over the next, roughly, 12 minutes.

I also want to thank the member from Don Valley West for the outstanding work she does for the members of her riding and specifically for her outstanding leadership on analyzing and guiding us through this budget, which I sadly must admit is thoroughly underwhelming.

As has been articulated before, this is a budget, sadly, that very clearly tells Ontarians that they're on their own, that this government does not have their backs, and that for the things which matter most to all of us, the things that matter most to Ontarians, they should just figure it out themselves. Unfortunately, this does not come as any surprise. As a young child, I was taught in my family to do what you say. If you promise something, then you have to deliver on it, and this is something, sadly, that this government struggles with.

1420

For example, this government said all fall that they would accelerate the credentialing of foreign-trained family doctors, and we're still waiting. I have no confidence whatsoever that this bill will or can deliver on the unambitious promises that it makes. You have to do what you say.

The recent reports from the Financial Accountability Office do nothing to reassure me that this government will do otherwise. In successive quarters, we have seen consistent underspending across all of the major ministries: \$1.3 billion less in health than promised, \$844 million less in education, \$175 million less in post-secondary education and \$458 million less in children and social services—the funding that goes to deliver services to those who need our help the most. Do what you say. This budget simply inspires no confidence, because the members haven't even delivered on their last budget.

But there's more to it than that, Madam Speaker. You don't just have to do what you say; you have to say what you do. This government has consistently committed to doing one thing, only to actually do another. For example, this government is funding a housing plan, but they promised in the process that they wouldn't touch the greenbelt, and now they're carving it up. They promised that they would protect our public health care system, and are now funding a plan that is so poorly conceived that it will lead to the corporatization and profitization of our health care. And so, as much as I am underwhelmed by this bill, I'm also concerned about just how much it is not talking about.

In health care, for example, the budget mentions nothing about eliminating hospital surge funding for COVID, even though it is getting eliminated tomorrow. It mentions nothing about access to hospital care for our most vulnerable and marginalized uninsured patients in Ontario, even though that also is getting eliminated tomorrow. Say what you're going to do.

The government has also made a profoundly short-sighted decision in eliminating paid sick days, which will

actually hurt our businesses and economy when sick people are forced to come to work and infect entire workplaces.

Most upsetting of all, there is no attention whatsoever to health care worker retention, even as this remains one of the biggest challenges that we face in health care right now. Say what you do. Not only is there no mention of health care worker retention, outside of this chamber this government is pursuing avenues to fight courts that have told this government that Bill 124 is unconstitutional legislation that infringes on charter and worker rights.

On Indigenous issues, I am most disturbed at the growing chorus of Indigenous people and communities who say they have not been adequately consulted on so many of the proposed changes in the budget. I have heard from Indigenous stakeholders, for example, that the government's plan for integrated community health services centres is being implemented without their input. And we all witnessed yesterday how Indigenous people share their concerns about the Ring of Fire. We must listen to Indigenous people, particularly the ones who are most at stake.

I have more I could say, but in the spirit of respecting the time of my colleague, I will simply mention that on the challenge of education, this government has dropped the ball, focusing upon things like infrastructure, like buildings, instead of supporting teachers by making sure that they are adequately funded. On this issue, along with so many more, the bill is very clear: People in Ontario are on their own. They don't matter, and this government does not have their backs.

With that, I turn it to the member for Don Valley West.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to my colleague from Don Valley East for his great work and support.

Speaker, I'm here today to talk about this motion 11, about Ontario's budget—not the federal budget, which the Conservative government seems to find more interesting today, maybe because they're coming to the same conclusion I am: that this budget is more of the same. It's uninspiring. It's uninspiring in terms of addressing our homelessness crisis, in terms of driving economic productivity across all sectors and in terms of making sufficient investments in post-secondary education which help drive our economy.

Actions speak louder than words, and while this government talks and talks and talks about record investments, the people of Ontario want more than the Conservative government's catchphrase when it comes to action. Let's talk about how this budget leaves people behind. While I welcome the talk of a \$202-million increase in funding for supportive housing and homelessness programs, this government now has to put its money where its mouth is.

This government seems unwilling to say how many chronically homeless people there are in our province, and we know that when it comes to addressing homelessness, in at least one case they've done quite the opposite. The

people of Toronto remember when the Associate Minister of Transportation lobbied against a supportive housing facility in his riding of Willowdale. They remember how then Mayor Tory and the city councillor pleaded with the associate minister to ensure the project proceeded, because it would save lives; that the modular housing units were ready to deploy and just needed provincial go-ahead. And they remember how the associate minister and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing refused to work with the city of Toronto, accusing the city of not sufficiently consulting the community, at the same time they were, ironically, passing legislation that guts the consultation process.

This is a government led by a Premier who broke his word when he said he would not build in the greenbelt. So while this government breaks its word and now says yes to building in the greenbelt, they have a history of saying no to helping the homeless when it's in their backyard.

We were just in Kenora in January as part of SCOFEA and heard about their homelessness problem, like many other northern and rural towns. According to the Kenora District Services Board, there are 400 homeless people there, a town of only 15,000. The most vulnerable people on our streets have been left behind by this government. While we hear estimates of a \$400-million parking lot that's being built to replace Ontario Place, our housing and homelessness funding gets an increase of only \$202 million. Here, again, their actions speak for themselves.

Now let's talk about productivity. Investing in manufacturing jobs is good—we need good jobs in this sector—but we also need to make meaningful investments in other sectors to see Ontario's economy be the hub of productivity. In their pre-budget submission, the Council of Canadian Innovators called on this government for increased investment to support innovation, digitization and technology in Ontario, to develop a semiconductor strategy, to future-proof our economy so that Ontario tech companies can also be roaring engines for economic growth.

Post-secondary education is also a key driver of our economy and productivity, and that leads to better quality of life. A couple of years ago, it came to light that Laurentian University was mismanaged financially. Regrettably, the provincial government abdicated their responsibility to ensure a sustained quality education in the north, and this government presided over massive cuts there that have greatly impacted northern students with program cuts.

We heard in the pre-budget consultations from l'Université de Sudbury. They implored the province to fund the university, because northern students deserve a French education in the north. They spoke about how when young people leave the north for post-secondary schooling, they often do not return. That has real consequences. Those bright kids are a lost asset to the north. What does this government say to them? "You're on your own."

This government strives for a path to balance, but people and families are not feeling the balance. The people

of Ontario have been feeling the pinch of inflation in housing costs, grocery stores, rising property taxes because of Bill 23, at our hospitals and in service cuts to transit. The people of Ontario want the government to take some of that \$25 billion spent on highways and spend a bit more of it on affordable and attainable housing; to spend less on luxury spas, which will not be accessible to all Ontarians, and more on health care and mental health.

We were just at the Canadian Cancer Society reception and heard from Rebecca, who suffered through high costs and administrative burden to get the home cancer drugs she needed. In 2022, all parties committed to tackling inequities faced by cancer patients by bringing together an advisory table; in their 2022 budget, this government said it would do just that. Speaker, as of today, the government has yet to take action.

As a member of the opposition, which I know many members opposite will remember from their years on this side of the House, it is my job to give the government constructive feedback on what they could be doing to make legislation better, how to do better for the people of this province.

1430

While this budget is uninspiring for us here in opposition, what the government needs to know is that this mediocrity translates to real life consequences for people in this province, who just need a little bit more and not more of the same.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to pose a question to either of the independent members who just spoke. I know in my riding of Essex people are very, very concerned about the carbon tax. I speak to my greenhouse growers and it's driving up the cost of vegetables; I speak to my grain farmers and it's driving up the cost of grain. I've spoken to the Minister of Agriculture and she's shared the same concerns with me about the carbon tax driving up the cost of food every day.

My question to the independent members is this: Since you have influence with the federal Liberal Party, which is imposing the carbon tax, will you meet with your colleagues at the federal level and ask them to pause the carbon tax?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Don Valley West.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Speaker, point of order: We are debating motion 11 today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The question is in order for the budget motion.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you, Speaker. As I mentioned, the government side seems to be really focused today on the federal budget when in fact we're here today to talk about this budget. And this budget is uninspiring.

If the member would like to talk about what we need to do to cut carbon tax and cut our greenhouse gas emissions, I think we could have some meaningful dialogues about that, if the government would talk about what they're doing to invest in green energy. I think this budget falls far

short of that. We know there's a lot to do. We know that the government cancelled wind projects. They cancelled solar projects. Those things would have helped us get to a place where we have fewer carbon emissions. We can talk more about what the government needs to do on reducing our carbon emissions, and I'm happy to do that sometime, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm sure we all have these families in our riding. For two decades I've had a family come to me, since I've been elected. They're on a wait-list for assisted living, the Rodgers family. Their son is Patrick. They're in their late sixties now.

Recently, I had another family and their daughter. The parents are in their eighties and their nineties and Christy can't find assisted living.

Currently, I had a constituent just last week talk about her son—he's 26 years old—Fernando. He has autism and he needs assisted living.

The government has a line in their budget of \$202 million for homelessness. Where in the budget is there a line for assisted living for families that need so much help in our province?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Thank you very much for that question. The message very clearly is universal in this budget: Ontarians are simply on their own. The services that they need, that have been underfunded in the last quarter, as per the Financial Accountability Office—they're not there. They weren't there before; they're not here in this budget; they're not going to be there in the future.

We as legislators and parliamentarians have an obligation to look out for the little guy, or the little gal. We need to have compassion, integrity. To respond to the member across, we have to collaborate with each other—with other levels of government but with each other right here in the room. Let's have a conversation, talk about the issues that actually matter to Ontarians. Affordable housing is inaccessible. There are over 62,000 people that cannot get access to autism services. What we're looking for, and what is entirely absent in this budget, is a government that has compassion for people who need help the most.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Markham–Thornhill.

Mr. Logan Kanapathi: Thank you to the member from Don Valley East for your presentation. I know you are a doctor and you understand the health care system very well and the dynamics of the hospital system. You're asking why we are not hiring foreign-trained doctors in the system.

Actually, we are hiring 50 more foreign-trained doctors into the system, and we allocated a huge chunk of money in this budget. Also, our plan—to both build the new hospital and expand the existing one—it's a plan to build a brand new hospital serving Mississauga and Brampton, a plan to redevelop St. Mary's General and Grand River Hospital in Kitchener-Waterloo, plan to build a new hospital in Uxbridge and one in Windsor.

We are doing huge investments through this budget. I will ask the member, don't you think these are huge investments in the health care system?

Mr. Adil Shamji: I do want to thank the member from Markham–Thornhill for his question. I also want to thank his wife for her exceptional service as a family doctor. And so—

Interjections.

Mr. Adil Shamji: Yes, so I know she will agree with me that there is far too much work that needs to get done. To be honest, the member has made my point for me. This budget is unambitious. We have 2.2 million people across our great province who don't have a family doctor, and this budget has a plan to just get 50 more? That's not something to be proud of.

To exactly the point that I made: There is no plan for the retention of health care workers.

As we continue to see mass attrition and a mass exodus of health care workers across multiple professions—physicians, nurses, PSWs and all of the amazing health care workers who work at the front lines and behind the front lines—this budget does not have a solution to the empty hospitals that this government is proposing and hoping to build.

We need staffed hospitals, not empty ones.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: My question is to the member from Don Valley East. In his remarks, when he was talking about education funding, he talked about how this government is not investing enough in the supports that are needed in our schools and for our students, but also mentioned that the government was instead—I believe the word he used was “instead”—investing in infrastructure.

I believe that we need to invest both in infrastructure and in supports. As you know, the school repair backlog is at over \$16 billion; under the Liberals, it was at \$15 billion.

I'd like to ask the member if he could clarify his comments, and also if he believes that we should be investing in addressing the repair backlog.

Mr. Adil Shamji: I thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for allowing me to clarify my comments, because certainly, my advocacy for us to treat people with compassion, to treat people according to their value and their worth, to pay people appropriately is not in any way meant to be mutually exclusive with the dire straits of the infrastructure of our public education system.

My comments were intended to highlight the fact that there may be some investments here that are intended to look at addressing that crumbling infrastructure. But in this budget, it is to the exclusion of the people who are essential to enable our education system to thrive. So thank you for allowing me to clarify that comment. I don't think that we disagree on this.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Rick Byers: Thank you to the members opposite for their comments. A question to the member from Don Valley West: I was listening to her remarks, and I think I

heard “uninspiring” and “mediocre” in describing the budget. I just wanted to run a few numbers by her, Madam Speaker, through you: infrastructure investments of \$184.4 billion, including \$70 billion for transit, the biggest in the history of the province; health care infrastructure, \$56 billion; highways, \$28 billion; education, \$22 billion; economic development, \$17 billion of investment in electric vehicle and battery plants; \$8 billion of cost reductions for businesses which, by the way, will enhance productivity, which I know is an important issue for the member.

I don't know about you, but those numbers, to me, actually seem very inspiring. Would the member not agree and support us in this budget?

1440

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): A quick response.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, those are big numbers, but I don't find them inspiring. It's more of the same. The numbers are very similar to those that were in past budgets. I talked about some of the ideas around investing in things like our semiconductor strategy, digitization and technology. Manufacturing jobs are good, but we need to invest in other sectors as well to make sure we're firing on all cylinders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: This afternoon, I'm addressing the motion on the budget. I'll be sharing my time with the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston, whom I've had the opportunity to meet during this session of the Legislature and who is a fine member serving his constituency well, and probably the most calm and serene individual in this chamber.

Other members before me have observed that this budget is a very big document; it's over 200 pages long. I think that every member has now had an opportunity to read all that and digest it so that they could make their comments in the chamber. I suppose I could talk about a lot of things in this budget. I've already talked about the hospital commitment that's been made to Essex county and Windsor–Tecumseh. I'm excited about that. My citizens are excited about that in Essex. My colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh is excited about that, and the citizens of Windsor–Tecumseh are excited about it as well.

But I'm not going to go through the entire 200 pages of the budget and speak about every topic. I have a very particular concern, and I'm going to focus on that one concern. That appears in this budget at page 100. So, if you got halfway through the budget, you arrived at it and you know exactly what I'm talking about: It's the \$13.4 million in this budget that is committed to continuing the strategy against illegal guns, gangs and violence.

That was a strategy that was introduced by this government. It's a wide-ranging strategy. It has several aspects to it. One of those aspects is to continue funding the strategy; that's very important. One of the aspects of that strategy is to train officers in the particular skills needed to go after

these very serious crimes, and one of the aspects of that strategy is to form a special unit that is specifically engaged with going after illegal guns and gang crime. Those are different aspects of the strategy, so it's not all about money. It's also about training: for example, training people who work in our correctional institutions in having the skills and knowledge that they need to recognize the trafficking of contraband—that's a skill.

Madame la Présidente, nous sommes fiers que nous ayons un programme qui vise spécifiquement des armes à feu illégales, les bandes criminalisées et la violence. Nous voulons que tout le monde en Ontario puisse vivre dans une communauté sans violence et sans la crainte d'être violé par les bandes criminalisées. C'est pour ça que nous avons cette stratégie, qui s'appelle la Stratégie de lutte contre les bandes criminalisées, les armes à feu et la violence.

Notre stratégie comprend des programmes de financement provincial. La stratégie comprend aussi la création d'une unité provinciale de soutien parce que tout le monde sait que les forces de police locales ont besoin de soutien. Nous savons que nos officiers dans les instituts correctionnels ont besoin de bonnes formations pour lutter contre les problèmes qui sont spécifiques à ces instituts, comme le trafic de contrebande.

I know that there are several members of the PC caucus who took a look at this specific strategy and are very, very glad it's in there and continues to be funded, for \$13.4 million.

Now, your everyday beat cop might not have all of the training and skills necessary to do the very challenging job of fighting gang violence and illegal guns. That's one of the reasons why we need this very specialized program. And to be absolutely clear, we have the support even of law-abiding firearms owners, who know that the ownership of a firearm is very important and ought to be treated with the most seriousness and safeness—and they are legal firearms owners, as compared to the illegal gun acquisition, which is happening through the border between Canada and the United States. That is a very important distinction to make.

What happens after these illegal guns sneak into Canada? Well, they get into the hands of gangs. The illegal guns get into the hands of gangs, and the gangs use those guns to go after some of the most vulnerable people in our society. That's why I'm very proud to support this program. I think the PC caucus is proud as well. I think the PC caucus is going to vote in favour of the budget because they know how important it is to continue a program which fights against illegal guns, gangs and the violence that those engender.

But we know that not everybody in this assembly feels the way we feel. We know that's not the case. In fact, we know that there are several members of this assembly who are very strongly opposed to what we stand for. We know that there are several members of this assembly who have been quite vocal about not wanting to fund police forces and not wanting to fight the fight that we want. They've even campaigned on it. They've been very vocal about it. They want to defund the police. Their position is entirely

opposite of the PC position: Whereas we want to fund police forces, they want to defund police forces.

But it's not just a few individuals—no, it is not. In fact, the NDP have actually completed an entire policy document, which they've entitled, "an Ontario NDP Commitment to Action." Now, I would characterize it as a commitment to inaction, because the entire policy document is all about defunding the police, and I think defunding the police is a very bad idea. But apparently, among the NDP caucus, they've committed an entire written policy document committed to defunding the police.

I have taken the trouble to read the policy document, and it's very clear as to what it wants to do: The NDP want to defund the police. That's what they want to do. Well, I want to make my position very clear: I don't agree with that policy document. I think it's a very bad policy document. I think that we should be funding our police forces. These are the people who work every day to protect you and me and our families. As I said before in my previous comments, these are specialized forces, some of them very specialized, who work specifically against illegal guns, who work specifically against gangs, who prey specifically on some of the most vulnerable populations in our province.

I'm very, very happy to see that in this budget 2023, the Minister of Finance has committed—and the PC Party, I believe, will commit when we vote on this budget—to continuing the financing of \$13.4 million to continue funding the police. I'm committed to that. I want to thank the Minister of Finance for recognizing the importance of funding our police forces properly, and I want to thank the Solicitor General for having a strategy that's going to deal with illegal guns, that's going to deal with gangs, that deals with the violence they create here in the province of Ontario against some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

1450

When it comes to a vote, I'm going to be voting for funding the police. I'm going to be voting for assisting the police officers who go out there and put their lives on the line to make it possible for me and my family to sleep well at night. And so, Madam Speaker, I will be voting in favour of this motion and in favour of properly funding our police forces.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you to the member from Essex for your thoughtful comments. I'll try to stay calm.

I believe this is a great budget. It's appropriate for the times that we are in, that we find ourselves in now. The budget continues the course and the focus on building the economy with a path to balancing the budget. A strong economy means good jobs. Employment: one of our social determinants of health.

A focus on education: This budget includes historical investments in education: new schools, a new curriculum for today's jobs and Ontario's needs. Education: another social determinant of health.

Investments in hospitals, schools, transit, housing and the infrastructure make it all work together.

A wise farmer lived on the adjacent farm to us—I guess they're all wise farmers or they wouldn't be farming. He used to say, "It's not just what you make, it's how smart you spend it." And this government isn't spending; they are investing. That's smart. Investing in people, in our education system, building schools, not closing them; in our health care system, record contributions, commitments and funding to our health care system; in infrastructure, transit and roads. We need infrastructure, as I said, so that the whole machine can run in harmony.

A good analogy for this budget is a plane. It took off in 2018, and it's still climbing to get to its desired altitude. This budget is holding the course and getting it done. We will continue to invest in Ontario for the people of Ontario. This budget builds on success.

Back to my neighbour: spending smart. Having our health care workers work to their full scope of practice, reducing the unnecessary pressures on our physicians, our emergency rooms and our hospitals—smart.

Additional funding in home care, community paramedics, mental health and addictions, getting people care where they need it, when they need it. Community paramedicine—what a great service. I worked in the Renfrew-Lanark area when the community paramedicine program first started in Renfrew—an immediate impact on people's ability to stay and remain in their homes—a great program. We heard the member from Renfrew announce the other day base funding for the community paramedicine program.

Helping our youth: \$170 million to improve outcomes for youth leaving the child welfare system so they can be healthy, happy adults, to help them meet their full potential, and \$200 million for the Homelessness Prevention Program. Something is in this budget for everybody.

I'll turn now to long-term care. Our government knows that fixing Ontario's long-term-care system in the modern day requires modern solutions. We are enhancing the health care experience in our 2023 budget, Building a Strong Ontario. As part of our plan for Ontarians to receive the right care in the right place, the government is also investing \$5.5 million in 2023-24 to build the new behavioural specialized units in long-term-care homes, including approximately 70 new specialized beds. These units specialize in care for those with complex behaviours by providing increased staffing, a tailored environment, focused behavioural assessments and enhanced care planning. This results in timely and appropriate care for residents with complex needs and avoids unnecessary hospitalizations—smart budget.

Ontario made a historic \$6.4-billion commitment to build more than 31,000 new and over 28,000 upgraded beds across the province by 2028. I've had the pleasure of visiting some of these new homes. When you think in my community there used to be one or two what we called "preferred homes," now there are three more new homes. We want all homes to be preferred homes. Since July 2018, 19 projects have been completed, adding over 2,300

new and upgraded beds across our province, with more on the way.

Working for you: We believe that Ontarians deserve connected and convenient care so they can stay in their homes for longer as they age or are able to receive care closer to home, freeing up space in hospitals and long-term-care homes. As we continue to modernize long-term care in the province, it is important that we continue to develop innovative approaches to deliver quality health care to our loved ones, while partnering with local municipalities.

One such program is the Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care Program. The program leverages the skills of paramedicine practitioners to reduce hallway health care, improve the quality of life of seniors, and provide appropriate and timely care for seniors in the comfort of their own homes. This approach is proactive, community-centred and patient-focused. This initiative is already offered province-wide and has connected more than 30,000 people to 24/7 non-emergency support at home. The plane continues to climb. I am proud that our budget recognizes the importance of this program by investing more than \$174 million over two years to continue the Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care Program. Now every community across the province has access to this service.

I'm also pleased to share that the government will be providing up to \$1.25 billion to long-term-care homes in 2023-24 to hire and retain long-term-care staff across Ontario. This is part of our historic \$4.9-billion commitment across four years to hire and retain more than 27,000 registered nurses, registered practical nurses and personal support workers over this period to help achieve our target of residents receiving four hours of direct care per day by March 31, 2025. That's building on the 12,000 registered nurses that were registered last year in Ontario, and with the recertification process for internationally trained, there have been 6,727 come in already. We're continuing holding the course.

We are making investments to build a strong Ontario so that we have the right infrastructure and supports in place to ensure our seniors experience the best quality of care and quality of life. From increasing nutritional support to increasing the level of care funding and beyond, we're working so that Ontarians are supported in every aspect.

I thank the Minister of Finance for all of his work, and his team and the Premier for holding the course so that we continue the good work that we're doing in long-term care.

Other aspects in this budget are directed towards those most vulnerable in our communities:

- adjusting core allowances under the Ontario Disability Support Program to inflation annually and increasing the monthly earnings exemption for persons with disabilities;

- investing an additional \$202 million each year in the homelessness prevention program and Indigenous Supportive Housing Program to help those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

- temporarily doubling the Guaranteed Annual Income System, the GAINS program, for 2023 for our seniors.

Like I said before, there's something in this budget for everyone. Proposing changes to expand this program will see another 100,000 additional seniors be eligible for the GAINS program.

I thank the ministers for their work, and their PAs for their work putting this budget together, and I fully support it.

1500

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Ms. Doly Begum: I listened to both of the members speak about the budget, and my question is to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston because he spoke specifically about the investments that the government is making and how proud he is.

One of the things that took place last night was the TDSB board meeting, and they made some really difficult decisions. They made a lot of difficult decisions which will really show the cumulative cuts over the last 20 years and the impact of that to our students and their learning.

So I want to ask the member, why has the government underspent, specifically, \$47 million in your previous budget, and now, while projecting for the education funding—and seeing the amount of violence and need for learning within our schools, why isn't your government spending more on education than before?

Mr. John Jordan: I don't know if we would call it underspending, but we're all aware of COVID and the impact it had on programs and services. Whether it's in education or in health care, there's money that has been earmarked that wasn't able to go out the door because the service providers weren't able to deliver that particular service. That's one fundamental reason why there is money that didn't go out the door. It's not the government holding back or tying the strings. This government is investing and spending on the things, and they're spending it smart, not just spending it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: My question is to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston. He spoke eloquently about the supports in this budget proposed for seniors and other vulnerable sectors of our population.

Specifically, my question regards our Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System. We've known, over the past few years with the pandemic, that there has been a general decline in overall mental health across the province, and particularly those that face challenges in terms of food security and housing security. This program has a historic investment of about \$3.8 billion over 10 years. We're increasing that base funding by 5% to \$425 million annually. I'm wondering if the member could please speak about the benefits that program will have for our residents.

Mr. John Jordan: Thank you very much for the question. Mental health and addictions has been one of the top priorities and one of the major issues for this government, and previous governments as well. Access to service is probably one of the biggest challenges, and the service providers provide that service. We've heard the

associate minister for mental health services speak about the number of youth centres that we have opened up across the province—again, looking at access to care. So that's \$170 million to improve outcomes, to help.

One of the things is for youth leaving the child welfare system. The transition is always a major issue for people's mental health, going from the child system into the adult system, and in this case, moving out of the welfare system as well. So transition of care is one of those focuses that will help us with mental health occurrences.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Wayne Gates: This is from OPSEU and JP Hornick, the president: "Privatization Makes Wait Times Worse, Not Better." That's for the member from Kingston. "Our health care system is in crisis, and it's clear that privatization is not the solution. Putting private profits over people won't fix wait times or solve the recruitment or retention crisis, which is causing staff to burn out and leave their jobs.

"This government has manufactured a crisis...."

My question to you: Can you tell me how many of the people from Niagara that you listed died in their homes that are owned by ConMed during COVID?

Mr. John Jordan: I can't tell you how many were from Niagara, but you've repeatedly told me how many have died in Ontario. I think it's important that all governments take responsibility for the neglect of the long-term-care homes in Ontario. It went on for decades. For all the time the member opposite from Niagara was in his seat, it was occurring. Nothing was done. I asked him earlier the question about how many long-term-care beds they put in so people could get into long-term care pre-2018, since 2011, since the member was here. It's 76 beds, in case anybody was wondering. So it's 60,000 and 76. I think we all have to look in the mirror and take a look and see what happened to long-term care, but this government is fixing long-term care, and I think it's represented in the budget. We're going to continue on that course.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Rick Byers: We've had two outstanding presentations from outstanding members.

I want to direct my question to the member for Essex, who talked about page 100 in the budget, and frankly, it's one of my favourite pages. I've earmarked it and whatnot. You really outlined the power of the \$13.4-million investment, the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy. I wonder if you can—and you did in your remarks, but I'm not a law enforcement officer. Certainly, we have some in the House. But you've got great experience here and understand specifically what's coming from this strategy. I wondered if you could remind us of those specific benefits of this important investment.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for that question, and thank him in particular for coming to my riding and speaking to the wine growers in my riding about what they wanted to talk about. I thank him for that.

Now, turning to his question, I have a particular interest in this matter, because I had some past experience in prosecuting on behalf of the federal government as an agent. What happens with guns that are illegally smuggled over the border is that they get into the hands of gangs, and then the gangs go out and intimidate the most vulnerable people in our society. I want to specifically say that this PC member of this provincial Parliament is 100% committed to funding our police departments and helping them go after gangs; whereas in comparison, the NDP caucus has a written policy to defund the police. It is a bad policy. It should be rejected. I reject it. I'm in favour of assisting the people who keep me and my family safe and keep the people in the riding of Essex safe from gangs and illegal guns.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Kingston. Over the last couple of weeks, I have raised some issues in question period based on what I'm hearing from residents of London West. I talked about two young nurses who are leaving London, moving to other provinces, moving to the US, because of the way that they are treated here, because of the way they feel disrespected and demoralized and exhausted because of this government's policies.

The health care programs that the member talked about all depend on having a health care workforce in place. My question is, why is the government not dropping its appeal of the unconstitutional Bill 124 and moving forward so we can actually have the health care workers we need in order to deliver the health care services that Ontarians deserve?

Mr. John Jordan: It's no secret the hard work this government has been doing to increase our health care workforce, building again on the 12,000 from last year, the 6,727 that have come in through the internationally trained program, the learn-and-stay program to assist our rural and northern areas.

Hiding behind a 2019 bill that only has a three-year life is not what we're doing. We're looking forward: What can we do to increase? And we know that other provinces across Canada are dealing with the same challenges; other countries are dealing with the same challenges. So to hide behind an old bill is not the answer. To move forward with new innovative ideas to increase our workforce: That's the answer.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: It's always an honour to rise on behalf of the residents of Parkdale–High Park to speak in this House, and today I speak to the 2023–24 budget motion that is before this House. This budget has failed to meet the needs of Ontarians and to address the current problems that the people of Ontario face. This budget has failed to meet the moment, and it is our duty as legislators, as elected officials, to stand up and fight for the needs of our people.

1510

Speaker, don't take it from me; take it from the Toronto Star editorial that was written last week. The title is, "An

Ontario Budget without Vision." That's the title, and there is a quote in that editorial that says, "If this budget were a Christmas present, it would be a three-pack of white socks. Not entirely useless. But an exercise in going through the motions." This is the feedback from people across the province, that this budget has failed to meet the moment. There's so much more we could do, that this government could do, but did not in this budget.

This is the biggest budget ever, at \$204.7 billion. There's so much we could do, particularly to help Ontarians who are struggling. Conservatives want Ontarians to think that this is the new normal, that this is as good as it gets, but things are not normal in Ontario right now. People are struggling to find an affordable place to live. They're being forced to go to work sick just to put food on the table. Cancer patients are waiting months for treatment. They're showing up at emergency rooms with a sick child, only to find it closed. In fact, in Ontario, more than any other province at any other point in history, we have had more emergency room closures than ever. The Ford government promised to deliver on these issues, but once again, with this budget they have failed to do so.

The NDP has a vision of an Ontario with more opportunity and prosperity, not just for the well-connected, but for everybody, for the everyday Ontarian. People are feeling squeezed with the rising cost of living, and this government is doing nothing meaningful to offer relief to everyday Ontarians. In fact, it's going to cost Ontarians more.

The Ford government is diverting public money into private health care facilities. What does that mean for Ontarians? Longer wait times, more ER closures, more nurses being driven out of our health care sector. They're shortchanging municipalities through massive cuts, meaning families will pay higher property taxes for poorer services. It also means that Ontarians who are going to work using transit will be waiting longer for the bus, and that it is going to be even harder to find an affordable place to live.

This budget shows that the province is moving in the wrong direction on housing. They're dismantling the greenbelt, and even that isn't delivering on what they're promising. This budget predicts fewer housing starts next year than this year, and they are nowhere near on track to meet the stated goal of 1.5 million homes in 10 years.

We in the Ontario NDP will fight to make sure we're investing in strong and caring communities that will attract workers, that will attract new businesses to our province and keep them here. We want to see communities with excellent health care, mental health supports, education workers who are able to help our children learn and work in safe spaces, more affordable places to live that have reliable public transit.

Speaking of public transit, I want to take a moment to say that on behalf of the leader of the official opposition and our entire NDP caucus, our hearts go out to Gabriel Magalhaes's family, friends and community members. Gabriel is the 16-year-old who died just last week from a stabbing attack at Keele station, which is located in my

riding. Only a few months ago, there was another knife attack on two people at the adjacent High Park station, and another constituent, Vanessa Kurpiewska, passed away from that attack.

Gabriel attended Keele Street Public School. His classmates will be hosting a community candlelight vigil this evening, starting at 8 p.m. from the High Park gates and ending at Keele station. I will be joining alongside my colleagues from the ATU—transit workers who are also ringing the alarm bells in terms of not just public transit, but the increase of violence that we're seeing.

Speaker, I want to take a moment here, because Gabriel's mom, Andrea, has demonstrated incredible courage and grace and has been shining a light on the issue, on the struggles that people are facing. I'm going to quote her directly. This is what she said: "We need more social services. We need more investment into physical and mental health. We need more support for housing. I feel like if things keep going the way they are going right now, so many people are going to be suffering the horrible pain that I'm going through right now."

Speaker, as a mom of two little kids, I can't imagine the pain, and so it is incumbent on all of us to address the root causes of violence—as Andrea herself has said—to address the social determinants of health. We have a choice as legislators. The budget is that choice. The investments we choose to make or not make are reflected in the budget, and this budget is not delivering. It's not delivering on mental health supports that are needed. It's not delivering on the housing that is needed. It's not delivering on the homelessness crisis that municipalities across the province are experiencing.

It's very important that we not only express our condolences, but that we take action. With this budget, again, this Conservative government is choosing to benefit a select few at the expense of everybody else. This budget is a failure of leadership. True leaders meet the moment. This one is out of touch with reality and out of touch with the experiences of people.

There's obviously a lot to cover in a budget, so I will only have time to go over a few key problems with this budget. I want to touch on housing first. It is getting increasingly unaffordable. In my riding of Parkdale–High Park, almost 60% of residents are tenants, and rents in this city are out of control—absolutely out of control.

Earlier this week, I joined tenants from 55 High Park and 58 Quebec Avenue in delivering a letter to Great West Life Realty Advisors asking for the dramatic increases to their rents to be stopped. These are buildings that are not covered under the Rent Control Act, and so their rents can increase by whatever amount the company decides. Even though it's a new building, there are no major repairs. There are no new services or anything like that; it's simply increasing because it's not illegal, but just because it's not illegal doesn't mean it's right. We know that tenants are suffering.

As well, with this budget, the government talks about creating a supply of housing. Yes, we need to increase the supply of housing—the official opposition agrees with

that—but we also need to ensure that it is (1) affordable and (2) that the government follow through on the recommendations of their own housing task force and build within existing boundaries. Report after report is showing that there is absolutely no need to build on the greenbelt.

1520

Speaker, the government passed Bill 23 and that is hurting municipalities a lot—municipalities like the city of Toronto, who are already with a \$1-billion shortfall. This government promised that they would make municipalities whole because Bill 23 cut development charges, and development charges are very important for municipalities. It is through development charges that the city is actually able to invest in the infrastructure that the people who are going to be living in these new homes are going to receive, infrastructure like green spaces, parks, child care. We can't just live in homes; we have to live in communities. We have to be able to access all of the services and we want to be able to do that. But if development charges are going to be cut, if the government is going to prevent the city of Toronto from collecting development charges, and if the government is not going to make any investments to replace that loss of revenue, then the city's services that we rely on are not going to be there. And cities need these services to function.

I don't have too much time, so I want to go over very quickly and touch a little bit on education. Earlier this week, again, I asked the government if they would repay the TDSB the pandemic costs because the TDSB was forced to tap into their reserves during the pandemic in order to meet the direction that was set by this government and by public health. They wanted to make sure that the health and safety needs of students, teachers and all education workers, everybody in the school community, were met and that they continued to provide academic excellence and supports during the pandemic.

Speaker, what I find particularly troubling is that the Financial Accountability Office has repeatedly come out with reports showing that this government is underspending. There is money that is being allocated to education, to health and to different areas, but that allocated funding is not being spent. And that's the same for education. While this government was underspending on education, they were forcing the TDSB to tap into reserves, and the TDSB has now reached a point where there are no more reserves. So for the upcoming school budget year, the board will be forced to make support staff layoffs, will be forced to cut programs, and we're already seeing that. Through a school newsletter at Humberside, parents and students were informed that their math drop-in program was going to be discontinued. In fact, it's going to be discontinued as of today.

At a time when the needs of students are still very high, at a time when we need more caring adults in our schools, when violence is up in not just high schools but in elementary as well, we cannot afford to lose any more staff. We cannot afford to lose programs in our schools.

Speaker, as I mentioned, budgets are about choices, and I want to let the government members know that we can

choose to invest in strong and caring communities. We can choose to have excellent public health care, mental health supports and invest in education workers. One of the things that increasingly I'm hearing about from my constituents is that it's no longer low- to middle-income families who are struggling. Most people are feeling the pinch. Not only are rents up, mortgages are up; the cost of buying a home is up. The dream of being able to have your own home, especially for young families, is feeling like it's slipping. It's further and further away—to the point, in fact, that people have to make very, very hard decisions about where the money goes, because wages are not increasing at the same rate as costs are going up. This is impacting people in a very deep way.

And I think about, particularly, the front-line health care workers. I think about public sector workers. Speaker. For them, not only are costs increasing, but this government, through legislation, Bill 124, is keeping their wages low. Inflation is through the roof, but public sector worker wages cannot increase more than the 1%. The court decision was that this bill, Bill 124, was unconstitutional. And instead of repealing Bill 124, instead of giving cost-of-living increases to public sector workers, particularly to our front-line health care workers, what is this government doing? Spending more public dollars in appealing this decision.

Speaker, we cannot have a great health care system without health care staff, and we cannot have enough health care staff—we are not able to recruit and retain the health care staff—if we're not paying decent wages, if we're not ensuring that every worker—including health care workers; many health care workers don't have paid sick days. With this budget, the government is bringing an end to the paid-sick days program. Paid sick days are good for the economy, because when workers are sick and they stay at home to take care of themselves or their child or their family member—perhaps a parent or a grandparent—it stops the spread. They won't be infecting and spreading the virus or the illness to their co-workers. Paid sick days are good and sound economic policy.

Speaking of workplaces, one of the other things that I'm also hearing increasingly is from our small businesses, through our BIAs, who are saying that one of the top priorities for the small businesses is actually greater mental health supports, because they are increasingly interacting with people who are struggling. That's making it hard for them to feel safe themselves, but also to make sure that the clients are safe, that the community spaces are safe. And so they really want to see greater mental health supports as a policy to support small businesses, Speaker.

In the last minute that I have, I just want to conclude by saying, again, this budget is a failure of the leadership. It's a failure on the part of this government because it fails to prioritize the needs of Ontarians and to invest in a better future for our province. Speaker, we don't have to accept this as the new normal. We can choose a different path, one that puts people first, one that creates a brighter future for all of us. Unfortunately, once again, the Conservatives have failed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I listened to the remarks of the member from Parkdale–High Park. I know that, from time to time, members of the NDP caucus have been concerned about violence and gang activity. And so my question with regard to this particular budget, which contains \$13.4 million to continue the fight against illegal guns, gang violence—

Mr. John Vanthof: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Point of order?

Mr. John Vanthof: I believe the member opposite is using a prop. I would prefer if he spoke without props. Thank you, Speaker.

1530

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Member from Essex, that is a prop.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Oh. Excuse me. May I read from it?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): What's your question?

Mr. Anthony Leardi: My question to the member from Parkdale–High Park, who is embarrassed for me to show the NDP policy statement with regard to defunding the police—and she should be embarrassed of it—is, will she stand with the PC Party, who support our police officers, the people keeping us safe, the people putting themselves in harm's way? Will she support the \$13.4 million to continue the fight against illegal guns and gangs?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Before I respond, I just want to clarify for the record that the member from Essex was using a prop, and the House leader simply referred to that because, as per the standing orders, you're not allowed to use a prop. It has nothing to do with being embarrassed about the document.

In fact, on this side of the House we have repeatedly said that in order to address violence, we need to get to the root of the violence. If the member listened to me, I spoke about Gabriel's mother, Andrea, who just lost her son to a violent attack, a stabbing. What is she calling for? More mental health supports, more investment in housing. She is calling on all of us to address the social determinants of health.

My response to the member is that we all want to address violence. Let's get to the root of it.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: I listened intently to the member's speech, and I think I would like just to ask her opinion. We very much support the police, for them to do their job, but we also believe that we need community support to help the community improve, so that there is less pressure on the police. Could you elaborate on that?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you to my colleague for that question. One of the things that I have heard quite a bit, including from police officers, is that they would really like to see greater supports in place. Let's say a police officer, or maybe it's even a transit worker, comes and

meets or interacts with a person in crisis. Even if they're able to de-escalate, what happens next? Where do they send that person? They need to be able to direct that person to the care and the support that the person needs. Oftentimes, that's where the gap is and the person is not able to get the programs that they need.

If we had more supportive housing, greater investments in community-based mental health care—the mental health associations are asking for an 8% increase to their baseline funding. They only received 5%. Mind you, Speaker, they have not had an increase in 11 years—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you.

The member from Thornhill.

Ms. Laura Smith: Through you, Madam Speaker: I listened thoughtfully to the member opposite's statement. Improving the long-term outcome for youth leaving the child welfare system by investing \$170 million over the next three years through the Ready, Set, Go program will help youth achieve financial independence, life skills and development. This is a particularly important issue for me, because I actually used to work within that system. I've seen the impact and I know what this can do for children.

Will the member opposite please consider this measure to improve the outcomes for children and youth leaving the child welfare system by investing this money?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: I thank the member opposite for her question. Look, you will get support from this side of the House, from the NDP, for anything that will help youth succeed, to make sure that the youth have all the right supports, that they are able to live in a way that will—especially for children leaving the welfare system, that they would be able to stand on their own feet, that they would be able to succeed in life and be independent.

But again, there is so much more that needs to happen, and that's what I was trying to get at with my budget presentation—that it failed to meet the moment. This is the largest budget ever in Ontario's history, and yet it is a budget without vision.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I received a letter from a grade 4 student at St. Jude Catholic School in my riding. He had some questions that I didn't know how to answer, so I want to share those questions with the member for Parkdale–High Park and see what she thinks.

He says that the solution to housing is not building on the greenbelt. He asked, “Does the Ontario government know that they will ruin that piece of protected land? Can the Ontario government stop the greenbelt construction and find another piece of land? Why didn't the Ontario government ask what the citizens of Ontario wanted before allowing developers to buy the land? Because obviously, no one wants protected land demolished.”

I think these are very thoughtful questions that need answers. I wondered if the member for Parkdale–High Park knows how to respond.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you to my colleague from London West for her question. I would say please

pass on my thanks to the student. Those are excellent questions. In fact, those are questions that we have been asking in this House.

Speaker, again, I want to go back to what I said during my presentation. Report after report is pointing out that the government does not need to develop on the greenbelt land. In fact, the government's own Housing Affordability Task Force has said that in order to meet the goal of 1.5 million homes, you don't need to develop beyond the existing boundaries of urban boundaries that we have.

Simply, the government is not listening to expert advice. The government is not doing the logical thing. The government is basically putting in place a policy, implementing an action that is benefitting a handful of developers at the cost of the future of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member for Parkdale–High Park for her question. Every week, when I come in to Queen's Park, I pass by her riding. I go by St. Joseph's hospital. I understand that a significant redevelopment is happening at St. Joseph's. I know back home, Hôtel-Dieu Grace and Windsor Regional, both CEOs have given me very supportive statements about this budget, indicating how much they appreciate the support being given to those particular hospitals as part of this budget.

My question for the member is, for St. Joseph's, is there good news that this government has provided for that redevelopment? If you can share with the assembly what that might be.

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Thank you to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for the question. I will say yes, I support the redevelopment that's happening at St. Joe's. They serve the west end community, so not just my riding but many ridings in the Etobicoke area as well—a very, very large catchment.

Speaker, I have met with the leadership at St. Joe's. Aside from the redevelopment, one of the greatest pressures that St. Joe's is experiencing is human resources. They need the staff. They need the nurses to be able to provide services to the people in the west end of Toronto. So I ask this member to please urge his side, his caucus and his government to repeal Bill 124, which would address the staffing pressures.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member.

1540

Further debate?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I will split my time today with my colleague from Oakville North–Burlington.

Madam Speaker, I am very delighted to stand today to support the new budget, of 2023. There are many aspects we can talk about this budget. My colleague beside me focused on one point; I will speak generally about, actually, two points: what this budget gives towards Mississauga, my city, and, as well, the health side of this budget.

Talking about Mississauga, we are getting close—more funding for the LRT, the Hazel McCallion Line, which is

huge spending in transit and covered in this budget, and we all know how that will help Mississauga's growth.

Also, in my riding, we got funding for a community centre, South Common Community Centre, and there is more spending in the city when it comes to festivities and all kinds of spending in this budget still covered here, in multiple government agencies like Trillium funding, which, again, helps Mississauga to be a vibrant city.

Also, the Mississauga hospital, Trillium Health Partners, which is going to be the biggest hospital in Canadian history, the biggest emergency room in Canada: It is a state-of-the-art hospital, which Mississauga is in bad need of. I can say that. Since I immigrated to Canada, we had two hospitals, and in 23 years, Mississauga has grown from maybe—I don't know—200,000 to almost more than a million now. Again, we have to expect, with this kind of growth, the health care system having issues. That should not be the case if proper planning was done, if the government which was at the time responsible for that did their job in projecting the growth and making this ready. Now, the hospital might take seven years to get done, but at least we are getting shovels in the ground, we're getting things started and working, and we hope that we can see that coming to life very soon.

Another aspect of health care which my colleague the independent from the other side touched base on is, where is the medical staff? Where in the budget is medical staff? Again, I will speak about that, because as a person who lived that dilemma—my wife was an international medical graduate. We had a challenge for her to get into the system with all the challenges there, which caused her to have to be in the province for seven years to get her licence in Ontario. That's another discussion; I'm not going to get into it. But I promised her at the time that we would work hard to change that, to make things different. Thanks to this government, who worked very hard in Working for Workers 1 and Working for Workers 2 and even Working for Workers 3, which is currently debated—today, in the morning, we were continuing debating on that. I was honoured to be speaking about that bill and standing to support it, because I gave a promise 21 years ago that this would change, to myself and to my family and to my wife, and it took me 21 years, but when this bill passed, I said we maybe spent two, three, four, six hours debating something, but that's going to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands of new immigrants coming to this country who will benefit from the change. On the day we were debating that bill, I said it's a promise made, promise kept, and I still support that because I see that budget is doing exactly that.

We are expanding medical workers. We added two more medical schools, one in Scarborough and one in Brampton. We added more seats for medical graduates. The IMG program—at the time my wife was doing the exam, for the whole country there were 24 spots. So all the IMG doctors, coming from anywhere in the world, were fighting for 24 spots. Maybe in five years with all the meetings we did with the Minister of Health at the time, they expand it to 75.

Today, the announcement—and I thank Premier Doug Ford for that. Today, he announced that for 2023 projected, we are adding 100 spots for undergrad and 124 postgrad. Today, he announced that we're expanding that, so there will be 295 spots for postgrads. This is the biggest investment in getting our health care force expanded to cover the shortage in doctors and family doctors, as my colleague said: 295 this year. I'm saying 24 spots across the country to 295 spots for Ontario. This is the kind of change this government is doing.

If we look into hospitals, we are adding a hospital in Windsor. We are adding a hospital at Oak Valley in Uxbridge, a state-of-the-art acute care hospital in Windsor, Ottawa Hospital Civic Campus, Runnymede Healthcare for first responder wellness and rehabilitation and, of course, the Mississauga hospital. There is huge spending in health care infrastructure. For this budget, it's \$48 billion over the next 10 years to build up our health care hospitals, as well as our medical staff.

Adding nurses: We added 6,000 new nurses, thanks to Minister Monte. He sponsored a program to help nurses to study. We are getting more nurses graduated in-home here in Ontario to be able to match the shortage. We are changing the working conditions for PSWs, personal support workers. We made the conditions of their work better. We added more to the hourly rate to make sure we can retain those. We are expanding into this. There are many colleges now offering training—very short training. I think it's a year's training or two semesters, and we are getting more PSWs to add to the force to support the need.

Adding long-term care: This is the first government—30,000 long-term-care beds since 2019. We approved more than 30,000 long-term-care beds. In seven years of the previous government, they added 640 beds for the whole of Ontario.

I'm very proud with my colleagues from Mississauga, the six MPPs from Mississauga. We managed to get for Mississauga 1,128 beds—just in Mississauga. I just want to compare the numbers: 1,128 beds in Mississauga versus 640 beds in seven years in the whole of Ontario.

Do you see the comparison? This is the amount of spending we are doing. It's all major projects: transit projects, highways, hospitals. This is infrastructure that's needed for Ontario to be ready to welcome 500,000 newcomers every year. It's going to be coming in the next few years for every year—500,000. They need housing. They need hospitals. They need highways. They need jobs. I'm very, very proud of this government for that budget which I see as unheard of.

1550

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Deepak Anand): Further debate?

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I'd like to join in the debate of Bill 85, Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023, in support of our government and the Minister of Finance.

Speaker, our budget plan is a strategic and targeted plan that aims to support both individuals, families and businesses, amidst the backdrop of ongoing global instability

and uncertainty. We are focused on building a resilient economy that can weather any storm by laying a robust fiscal foundation that will benefit future generations. And thanks to careful planning and a balanced approach, we've developed a clear path forward to balance the budget while still delivering on our plan.

We are providing increased supports for employers and investing in skilled workers. We are committed to strengthening the health care system, and we are investing in infrastructure such as roads, highways, transit and broadband networks across the province. Our vision also includes investing in the critical minerals sector in the north. But the work doesn't end with extraction of these rich mineral deposits. Our plan will integrate the critical minerals in the north with Ontario's manufacturing powerhouse in the south, ensuring Ontario takes its rightful place in the global supply chain for the economy of the future.

Our objective is to make life more affordable for the people of Ontario by keeping taxes low, cutting the gas and fuel tax last year and extending it to the end of 2023, reducing electricity costs, cutting red tape for small business and entrepreneurs, removing double fares for GO Transit and local transit. It was just last week that I joined the Premier, the finance minister and the economic development minister in Oakville as they announced plans for a new Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. This tax credit, if passed, would provide a 10% refundable corporate income tax credit, helping local manufacturers lower their costs, invest and expand, creating good-paying jobs and helping rebuild the economy, giving Ontario-based manufacturers another reason to invest in homegrown, Ontario-made innovation and expanding operations.

Over the last two and a half years, Ontario has attracted \$17 billion in investments from global automakers and suppliers of electric vehicle batteries and \$3 billion in investments from global life-sciences companies.

With some of my time today, I would like to highlight how this budget will improve the lives of the most vulnerable of our citizens. With some of my time, I think it's important, because when you look closely at what our budget is all about, it really is focused on people: the people of Ontario. Our government is focused on the economic and healthy recovery of Ontarians post-pandemic. As a result, we are investing an additional \$15.3 billion over three years in the health sector: 50 new hospital projects, 3,000 new hospital beds over the next 10 years.

Our government is acutely aware of the devastating impact COVID had on the mental health of hard-working people in our province. This budget addresses this pressing issue through a historic investment of \$425 million over three years for mental health and addictions, including a 5% increase in the base funding of community-based mental health and addiction service providers.

This \$425 million investment will directly impact mental health and addictions services across the province that are easy to access and there when needed; children and youth, by providing access to mental health and addictions services, primary care and social and community supports; children and youth suffering from eating

disorders. It will also maintain supportive housing and services for people living with mental health and addictions challenges as they transition from hospital to the community.

In my community of Oakville North-Burlington, CMHA Halton CEO Rashaad Vahed stated, "This funding increase is a historic boost to community-based mental health services to continue to deliver supports by stabilizing what we provide and helping to retain qualified staff as operating costs continue to rise.

"Most of all, it will help our friends and neighbours in Halton get care when, where and how they need it to improve their health and wellness."

We are committed to assist the most at-risk individuals in society. If the focus of this budget is building a strong Ontario, we must first build strong Ontarians. By investing in mental health supports for the more vulnerable citizens, we are investing in Ontario.

As a former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Long-Term Care, I'm pleased to see our government's further investments for older adults with complex health needs. The government plans to invest \$5.5 million for new behavioural specialized units in long-term-care homes, adding about 70 specialized beds for individuals with complex needs. This is in addition to the historic \$6.4 billion since 2019 to build modern, safe and comfortable long-term-care homes for residents. This investment will result in over 31,000 new and 28,000 upgraded beds across the province by 2028. Every older adult wants to age with dignity, and these investments will ensure high-quality and compassionate care for those seniors most in need of care.

We know that older adults prefer to remain in their homes as long as they're able to do so, with some supports. Last year, the government announced a historic \$1 billion to improve home and community care. In this budget, we are accelerating \$565 million to stabilize the services seniors are receiving.

While we're on the topic of caring for seniors, I also want to mention the Guaranteed Annual Income System program, GAINS. It proposes changes that would expand the eligibility of GAINS starting in July 2024, which will see about a 100,000 more low-income seniors receive payments. This represents a 50% increase in the number of recipients.

At the same time, to continue to put more money in the pocket of eligible seniors, for the first time, the government will be indexing the benefit annually to inflation, providing even more financial support to low-income seniors.

Let us not forget seniors built this province. They worked hard to create a better future for all of us. We owe them our respect and support.

We've also increased Ontario Disability Support Program income rates by 5% and adjusted annually to inflation, and invested an additional \$202 million each year for supportive housing programs to help people at risk of being homeless.

Today some of my colleagues have touched on the initiatives our government is implementing to ensure the

safety of our communities. Given the recent tragic events, it is vital to highlight them. Our government is actively tackling crime and working to ensure we have safe streets and communities for law-abiding citizens. To combat gun and gang-related offences, Ontario is investing \$13.4 million in the fiscal year 2023-24, building upon the accomplishments of the Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy. This additional funding will continue to support effective gang prevention and intervention strategies that have already proven successful. All Ontarians should be able to live free from fear or intimidation.

Now, the lingering effects of the pandemic, Russia's aggression towards Ukraine, China's economic resurgence, the ongoing energy transition and the global trade impacts of policies such as the United States' Inflation Reduction Act have presented challenges. As a result, more and more global trading partners are turning inward, leading to disrupted and strained supply chains.

The post-pandemic environment has resulted in elevated inflation, putting a financial strain on families and businesses, making it increasingly challenging to afford basic necessities like housing, groceries and household goods. In response to these challenges, the Ontario government has introduced this budget to serve as our blueprint for building a strong province and to provide families, workers, businesses and individuals with certainty: the right plan to not just get through these challenges but emerge as a strong Ontario.

A vote in favour of the Building a Strong Ontario Act is a vote in favour of the people of Ontario, a vote for the future generations of Ontario. Speaker, I ask members to vote with the government and to pass this bill.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Question?

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the member for Mississauga–Erin Mills. I noticed in the budget that there is an increase in the amount of funding that is going to be earmarked to for-profit health facilities. I am concerned about this because I am seeing what's happening in Ottawa, and I'm seeing planned cancer blitzes, cancer surgeries for people who are in life-threatening conditions—many of them are—being cancelled because there's not enough nursing staff available because they're working for the for-profit clinic that operates on the weekend and can pay nurses more.

What commitments is this government going to make to ensure that Ontarians get the absolutely life-saving surgery that they need and that it is not threatened by the arrival and expansion of for-profit health clinics?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much for your question. Actually, this question is—the opposition keeps bringing back again about privatization of health care. I don't see any privatization in this. I see that as a public-private partnership. Small hospitals who have the medical capacity to offer operations and do cataract surgeries or eye surgeries—why don't I as a government make use of that infrastructure? Why don't I expand the hubs doing those surgeries from two hospitals to 20 centres and clear the backlog? Again, I don't see that as privatization,

because at the end of the day, the patient is getting the same service using the same card, their OHIP card. I don't know where this “privatization” word came from, and I—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member from Erin Mills.

The member from Essex.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: I want to thank my colleague and my seatmate, the great member from Mississauga–Erin Mills, who's a great seatmate and doing a great job representing his riding. Also, I really, really admire his wonderful commitment to promoting the Coptic community in our province—what a wonderful commitment.

We're excited about this budget in Essex county because of the health care investments it makes, and I want to know what this budget is going to do for his riding and his people in Mississauga–Erin Mills.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much to my colleague from Essex and touching on this item. Again, I would continue my discussion around health care because I still think that with all of what's going on, COVID actually exposed what we already all know, that the system is not working. We have to get something out of the box. We need to work on bringing more new ideas, using technology, expanding different types of services where we can offer the service without having to jeopardize our patient numbers and load, current and coming. So again, I would like to thank you. In Mississauga, we have a big hospital coming—the biggest hospital. We are looking forward to that. A hospital doesn't only come with patients; it comes with emergency; it comes with making more doctors and more specialized doctors and training students as well.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Chris Glover: I'll ask my question to the member from Oakville North–Burlington. Thank you for your remarks today. On this side of the House, we are deeply, deeply concerned about the privatization of our health care services. We know that private, for-profit care costs more. A knee surgery in a public, not-for-profit hospital costs about \$10,000. It's somewhere between \$20,000 and \$28,000 in a private, for-profit clinic. The Auditor General reports that we've got excess surgical spaces in our public, not-for-profit hospitals. Why isn't your government using those? Why don't you repeal Bill 124 so that we get more nurses and health care workers on the job? Why is your government creating a crisis in our public health care system, only to turn it over to private for-profit, where we'll be paying much, much more?

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question. I do appreciate your perspective, but I must respectfully disagree with the premise.

When we got elected in 2018, we inherited an already-broken health care system, regrettably, because the key investments had not been made by the previous government. As an example, when my colleague from Mississauga–Erin Mills was speaking, in all of the province in

the eight-year period prior to us being elected, there were only 611 long-term-care beds built throughout the whole province.

So those investments have been made now. We're making key investments not only in long-term care, but in hospitals. We're making them across the board, in order to ensure that we have the hospitals there to take care of particularly what I call the urgent surgeries, and then we're allowing for community clinics to be able to deal with some of those procedures that can be dealt with in clinic settings. We're also investing in health-care workers, and ensuring that they're funded to be able to attend courses that will actually accelerate their graduation from those courses.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): The member from Mississauga–Lakeshore.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: My question will be for the member from Oakville North–Burlington. The previous Liberal government failed our seniors with only building 611 long-term-care beds through the province of Ontario. As I'm aware, we are building over 30,000 new long-term-care beds and 28,000 rebuilt beds in the province of Ontario, a total of 58,000 beds. In my riding alone we're building 1,152 beds, with two twin towers at one location with 632 beds, more than the Liberals built in their whole entire mandate. Can the member please elaborate more on the long-term care that we are building in this province of Ontario?

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I'd like to thank the honourable member from Mississauga–Lakeshore for that excellent question. He's quite right: The investments that we're making in long-term care are critical to the success of our health care population. As we know, we are living in a province where our seniors need care, and if you have complex care needs, many of them are not able to have the care they need in home-based or community care, so investing in long-term care is vital.

The province, in the last few years since 2019, has invested in building 30,000 new long-term-care beds and 28,000 redeveloped beds. This is critical in order to ensure that our seniors have the quality and compassionate care they need. In addition, we've put money into being able to hire 27,000 personal support workers and nurses for long-term care in the coming years, and also have committed into law four hours of direct care for each resident in long-term care. Thank you for that wonderful question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the member for Oakville North–Burlington. Last week, we had food banks from across the province gathered here at Queen's Park to call on the government to make those fundamental public policy changes that would address the root causes of food insecurity in this province.

Food banks told us that they are seeing huge spikes in first-time users. They are seeing dramatic declines in donations because of the affordability pressures that people are facing in this province. We need to see a doubling of ODSP and Ontario Works rates. We need to

see rent control in order to lift people out of poverty. Why are those measures not included in the 2023 budget?

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: I'd like to thank the honourable member opposite for her question. I know that her question and her concerns for these individuals are very heartfelt, as it is for many of us on this side of the House as well.

Through you, Speaker: You know that we've made significant investments into ODSP. The government increased the support rates and the maximum monthly amount by 5% in 2022. And starting in July 2023, ODSP rates are also going to be adjusted annually to inflation. This is the first time ODSP rates have in fact been adjusted to inflation. We're making the necessary investments to be able to help our most vulnerable people in our community.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further debate?

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the 2023 Ontario budget motion on behalf of my constituents of St. Paul's. I understand that this is the biggest budget in Ontario's history as well. This budget comes at a time when Ontarians need to see investments in them more than ever. Things aren't okay, and too many folks are struggling. People in Ontario are facing unprecedented struggles. Young people are stressed out about their futures. The past year has been marked by the highest inflation seen in decades. The very basics of food and shelter have shot up in cost while, of course, wages have not.

Given the scale of what's facing our province in 2023, this government should be doing more, not less, especially a government that withheld more than \$6 billion in Ontario contingency funds, saving it for a rainy day. Well, guess what? It's pouring in Ontario. People need infrastructure and transit they can rely on, housing they can afford, not tenants forced to spend 50%, 60% or more of their salaries for rent, not mounting the school repair backlog and fast-tracking us towards the worst climate change.

This budget hasn't read the room. It's not responding to the pressing items concerning folks in St. Paul's and the rest of the province. For our community in St. Paul's, we're often hearing about housing concerns from everyone: lower-income earners and middle-income earners are still having to make strategic choices at the grocery checkout; artists, teachers and education workers; folks working in social services; cashiers; people on ODSP and OW; students and seniors on fixed incomes. I've even had some conversations with folks who work for the Ontario government about their affordability concerns. It's not an easy time for most.

In St. Paul's, our community is made up of more than 60% tenants. Where are they in this budget at a time when the average one-bedroom in the GTA is costing more than \$2,500 a month?

Last night, I joined some tenants at 55 Brownlow, who are fighting to stay housed, for their sign-making party. Yes, rather than resting after a long day's work, there they were, having some juice and chips and whatnot, making

signs to remind this government that housing is a human right, that you cannot put profits of greedy developers—this government's friends, it appears—over people. They're being demovicted. One tenant has lived there for over 40 years. She's a senior, and she doesn't know where she will go.

These tenants want to be guaranteed first right to return. They want guaranteed rent control and a guaranteed rental replacement. They, like I, do not want to see their fully functioning and safe building torn down to make space for expensive condos few can afford. Will this Conservative government hear their demands? Will you repeal Bill 23, your Conservative housing bill that does not guarantee real rent control and that threatens municipal rental replacement bylaws?

To afford a one-bedroom rental in this current market, an individual or a household has to bring in roughly \$100,000 a year—more than that. This is simply not sustainable or obtainable for many of the young families, single-dwellers and also the newcomers struggling to make St. Paul's home. If some of the highest-income earners in the city can't afford it, what about those on ODS-Poverty and OW? It's important to note this government does not double ODSP or OW—not even close. Let's be honest. Even with a doubled ODSP and OW rate, good luck to someone in Toronto, in St. Paul's, anywhere really, to be able to afford a home.

We need real affordable housing. MAID, medical assistance in dying, should never be where unhoused or precariously housed people on disability have to turn. Government should never make it easier for people to find death than to find a home. MAID has its purpose, mind you, but this should never be it.

And this Conservative government pats its wealthy selves on the back about a 5% increase. Ask my community member Shaun on Winona—the 5% is pennies. Recipients aren't even allowed to use the 5% where it's most useful for them in their budget. Even the 5% comes with strings attached.

The ODSP/OW rates simply are not enough. The Liberals froze the rates for years, legislating poverty, and then offered people a 3% increase as an election promise in 2018—that's what I'd call a little too late. Then this Conservative government slashed the 3% in half, giving people just 1.5%. Tell me, were people on ODSP/OW not worth the investment?

And let's not pretend this issue started in 2018, or even with the Liberals. Former Premier Mike Harris's Conservatives cut rates by 20%. That was unconscionable. But hey, he's living high off the hog now, cashing in on the for-profit long-term-care home cash cow, where roughly 5,400 elders perished due to this Conservative government's chronic underfunding and understaffing. I still live with the stories I heard of people's elders dying in their own feces, covered in urine, rodents, bugs. This Conservative government should never have let that happen.

Our Ontario NDP official opposition is calling for an immediate doubling, at least, of ODSP/OW. The program must be revamped and matched to inflation so people

aren't constantly being plunged further into poverty. We would redevelop the system by co-designing it alongside people with disabilities.

We are in an indisputable housing crisis of an unprecedented magnitude. Meanwhile, this budget is actually cutting the overall funding to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing by \$124.4 million. As this government talks about their plans to build, I wish to remind them that Ontarians don't need help in 10 years or whenever this government's supposed 1.5 million homes are being built—a number they aren't even on track to meet, with their housing starts projected to be even lower next year.

Where are your solutions for today, for this moment? This budget has missed this moment. And similar to this Conservative government's terrible track record with costly, over-budgeted and chronically late P3 contracts that have made transit projects like the long overdue, over-budget Eglinton LRT construction in my community—you can't keep making promises that will come years from now, conveniently outside of your term as government. Promises years down the line aren't promises people can depend on today.

Conservatives slashed real rent control. That means more unhoused. It means more people, including survivors of gender-based and intimate partner violence, living in unsafe and undignified housing because they've got no other options. Instead of helping, the government is propping up housing profiteers looking to push tenants out of their rent-controlled units so they can profit from vacancy decontrol with new unsuspecting victims. It's why this government must pass our "rent control for all" legislation, as well as our rent stabilization bill demanding rent control on all buildings and rent transparency, where the new tenants pay what the last tenant paid.

Through the dead of winter, the tenants at 64 St. Clair West went without heat for a whole week under the property management of Briarlane Corp. Electrical shut-downs, water shutoffs, removed laundry access, constant construction noise, noise pollution—this contravenes tenants' rights as per the Residential Tenancies Act.

This government's lack of real affordable housing is also fiscally irresponsible. Preventing homelessness is a fraction of the cost of reacting to it. Studies show that investments in social housing end up being about one fifteenth of the cost of institutional responses to homelessness, like prisons and hospitals, and about one seventh of the cost of emergency shelters.

A recent Star article showed that last year, nearly 5,000 unhoused people came through the doors of St. Michael's Hospital's trauma centre, and 15% of those were simply because they had no other place to go. Without any real strategy in place, hospital staff were giving out backpacks with gift cards to 24-hour food services just so that unhoused people could stay warm and fed overnight. Those are the figures out of just one hospital of many in this city and more across the province—hospitals in Ontario where ER doors were often closed; surgical suites left dark; nurses leaving in mass exodus because of, again, the chronic underfunding of our public health care system, a

plan put in place by this Conservative government to create a health care crisis so they could sweep in with their grand plan of privatization of health care.

Health care costs will continue to surge if the homelessness crisis isn't addressed. There must be a housing-first approach across this province that recognizes housing as the social determinant of health and the human right that it is. Conservatives cannot continue to attempt to balance budgets on the backs of the most vulnerable in society. We need real investment in a comprehensive housing strategy that includes social, supportive transition housing, more assisted living housing and co-op housing, all of which have been proven to make housing affordable for all Ontarians and to ensure their dignity remains intact. This budget includes no new funding, it appears, to build new social housing or even protect what is existing.

1620

For co-op housing, the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada has called this budget "a missed opportunity to create affordable co-op homes" as a way to meet the housing needs of low- and moderate-income households.

I see the benefits of co-op housing in my community when I think of the fine folks on Melita, for instance, where co-op housing has offered folks affordable and dignified places to live, including seniors, intergenerational families, young families and people on fixed incomes, who have said they would otherwise be forced to leave their communities without it. In our home, we have nine co-op buildings and about 596 units of co-op housing, and we'd be open to welcoming more.

The market on its own will not solve the housing crisis. This government cannot keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again and expect a new outcome.

Similar to housing, schools are in crisis. School boards are in crisis. According to the TDSB, rates of violence and lockdowns are at new heights as a direct result of the mental health crisis our children and youth are facing. Meanwhile, less than 10% of schools across the province have adequate mental health professionals to support their students, courtesy of this government. Instead of ensuring every Ontario school has all the mental health supports they need, the government refuses to reimburse school boards' COVID-related expenses, expenses that were prescribed by their own government and Toronto Public Health to keep our kids safe.

The government has got to do better. When school boards drain their reserves, it prevents them from hiring the very mental health professionals we need to keep our schools safe. It's why I got petitions from ETFO, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, signed by hundreds of my school community members from our ward 8, begging this government to "stop the cuts and invest in the schools our students deserve."

Is this government suggesting that my community members are liars, or making up the concerns and challenges they have about the government spending?

The 2023 budget means school boards will be forced to cut hundreds of staff to overcome deficits, at a time when we should be adding more supports—more social workers,

more psychologists, more teachers and more education workers—to lower ballooned class sizes.

Clearing the deficit of the TDSB—one they incurred, again, for pandemic-related costs—is not optional. It should be mandatory. This would cost \$64 million. That is less than one tenth the cost of the gifts this Conservative government has given to its wealthy corporate buddies through corporate tax cuts.

Teachers and education staff are doing too much with too little to get students where they need to be. With this budget, the next school year will only get worse without any commitments to increase the number of teachers, education workers and school staff.

I also want to say that investing in education is an investment in our economy. Research shows that for every \$1 invested into public education, we see \$1.30 return back to our economy. This also works in the opposite direction, too. The same study, by Aimee McArthur-Gupta, completed for the OSSTF, shows that just a 3% drop in high school graduation, as a result of this government's underspending, adds \$3.8 billion in costs to our budget over the next 20 years.

Access to excellent education is a social determinant of health, and health is top of mind for many in St. Paul's. The health budget is \$300 million less than expected. This is likely only going to get worse as this government continues to say no to 10 permanent paid sick days and is cancelling their lousy temporary program at the end of the month.

Speaker, paid sick days are a proven, effective strategy to ease pressure on our health care system by preventing the spread of COVID and other infectious diseases, I might add. This government has said no to workers and no to Ontarians almost 30 times, if I'm not mistaken, when it comes to asking for paid sick days.

This budget's failure to answer to social determinants of health, like stable housing, meaningful poverty reduction and adequate investment in education and preventative health care, will only widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots. We've got to keep our health care system a publicly funded health care system. Government cannot line the pockets of shareholders and support the upselling of unnecessary goods to vulnerable seniors while also reducing OHIP-covered eye checkups for seniors 65 and older, from once every 12 months to, I believe, now once every 18 months.

All Ontarians need assurance that when they need health care, they'll get it, with no hidden fees or added charges, with no pay-to-play schemes that mean they're left waiting as those who can afford it jump the line. People in Ontario, regardless of their status, need assurance that their health care remains their human right. It is why this government must keep coverage in place for all uninsured people in Ontario.

I stand firmly with the Healthcare4All Coalition and some of my constituents who were just outside on the lawn of Queen's Park today, demanding that the government not cut the program that is scheduled to be cut tomorrow. Rather than giving gifts to "independent health facilities,"

the government must do all it can to support our publicly funded system, so folks can get fast, excellent service without financial barriers.

As I mentioned earlier this month, this budget removes the \$5 million in COVID recovery grants for arts and artists. This is while it only maintains the \$60-million Ontario Arts Council budget, another drop in the bucket for this government, as mentioned in an article from the *Globe and Mail*. Realize that even if the government had maintained it at \$65 million, due to inflation, that still would have been a cut.

The pandemic had a disproportionate impact on the arts and culture sector. This is especially true for small-to-medium grassroots organizations and independent artists, who were subject to regulatory unfairness by this government, unfairness that kept their work on hold through pandemic restrictions while, frankly, larger organizations that were able to have the minister's ear were allowed to carry on.

I addressed this last year in a letter to the Minister of Health—oh sorry, the Minister of Labour; I wrote letters to the Minister of Health as well—to the Minister of Labour, as well as to the former Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries and the Minister of Health, to which I never heard back from the ministers on, by the way.

Research has suggested that the full recovery of the arts and culture sector will take between four to six years, yet this government is already cutting their recovery fund. Speaker, the arts and culture sector is an economic powerhouse, contributing some nearly \$3 billion to our GDP and over 300,000 jobs. That's not even accounting for its positive impact across sectors, including on mental health and tourism, easing pressure on an overrun system—art as a tool in education. Its creation of beyond culture industries: to boost tourism, hospitality, tech and trade work. The contribution of local artists and culture, however, is not a given; it requires investment for it to work.

In response to a petition I made and circulated demanding no cuts to OAC funding, we received thousands of signatures in a matter of days from many artists and cultural workers—some new to the industry, some decades deep—who are fearful of their ability to stay in their creative industry. This government talks endlessly about attracting investment and creating jobs. Right now there are close to 400,000 jobs in this province that are unfilled. How do we make it work? How do we attract folks to stay in Ontario? We invest in the arts.

The past year has seen rates of people moving away from our province to another at a 50-year high. Folks, and especially artists and cultural workers, are exhausted from moving contract to contract through gig work, and they're facing the highest cost of housing they've seen. We don't need them going to Quebec. We don't need them going to BC. We need our artists and cultural workers to stay right here in Ontario.

But I'll tell you, some of these other provinces recognize the value of arts. In Quebec, for instance, they've increased the arts funding by 60% to \$200 million. I assure

you, Ontario artists deserve to also be looked at and acknowledged, and it cannot only end with film and TV. It has to include everyone.

I fear this budget has not addressed the moment. Budgets are value statements. They are decisions, and this government has to ask themselves who and what matters to them, and who and what doesn't matter to them, based on the decisions they've made in this budget. Take a moment and listen to the rallies. See the disenfranchised faces of people here in Queen's Park, day in and day out, in the gallery and on the front lawn, protesting for fair wages and safe working conditions, health care, education, housing, clean drinking water, clean air, fair elections, democracy, climate justice—you name it—ending poverty, ending racial discrimination.

1630

You might not have to listen to me. Who cares? I'm just one person. You might not choose to listen to the Ontario NDP official opposition. But the hundreds of thousands of people—the hundreds of thousands of people—who have shown up on the lawns, who have signed the petitions begging this government to do better since 2018, they can't be wrong. They can't be all wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Questions?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you for the presentation from the member of the opposition. But this budget is not only about spending; this budget is about building Ontario's economy today and tomorrow. So it is a budget to also attract investment.

GM: They have more than a \$2-billion investment to protect thousands of jobs. Tesla is manufacturing the equipment to help the batteries for the future. Honda is investing \$1.4 billion to make hybrid vehicles. Ford is making a \$1.8-billion investment to produce EVs. Toyota has invested \$1.4 billion to make vehicles, including hybrids. GM is building Canada's first-ever full-scale EV manufacturing plant. And Volkswagen in St. Thomas is also building their first-ever overseas battery cell plant here in Ontario.

So I want to ask the member from the opposition why her presentation is only about spending, but not attracting any investment into our province?

MPP Jill Andrew: So that was a long question, but you know what I'll focus on? Ontario Place. I just want to give a shout-out to Ontario Place for All and Architectural Conservancy Ontario and also some of my colleagues who are calling for a value-for-money audit of the Conservative government's plan to hand over a massive chunk of publicly owned Ontario Place to a for-profit place—where is it?—based out of Austria.

I don't have a problem with investment, but I think we need to invest in Ontario first. And Ontario Place and this government's ill-thought-out plan for Ontario Place is a best example of the way in which they prop up their buddies—heck, foreign corporations now—as opposed to propping our community up. We don't need a \$600-million private spa courtesy of the government. What are we going to call it? Austria place, or the place formerly known

as Ontario Place? Let's bring the community in to consult about Ontario Place, a place many of us in this House still enjoy to this day.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to thank the member for her speech this afternoon, and I'd like it if she would explore, expand on, for a moment, what she has found in her riding when it comes to the impact of the refusal on the part of this government to actually raise ODSP rates.

In my riding, we've seen tremendous misery, tremendous pain and suffering. My guess is that you've had a similar experience in your riding, but if you can take a moment, expand and talk about some of those stories, I think we would all benefit.

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you to the member from Toronto—Danforth. I met a woman—and I won't use her name because I don't have consent. When I met with her, she was actually yelling and screaming and blaming me, frankly, for her inability to afford the basics of food. We had a long conversation. She apologized for yelling and screaming and, what she said, using a sailor's potty mouth. And I said, "Don't worry, I've got one too." And we realized that what she was simply trying to do was get by. She was so angry, so distraught that, on ODSP, she couldn't afford her groceries—not even the groceries at No Frills—that she was just lashing out.

What are people facing? They are literally facing being unhoused. Some of them are literally considering medical assistance in dying. And some of them are simply just walking around feeling so distraught that they cannot afford the basics.

And I never forgot this woman. We're still in touch, actually. I'm going to see her next month and I'm going to tell her that you mentioned ODSP, because that will matter to her. She's very happy when we mention it and she's thrilled to hear that we want to at least double the ODSP/OW rates.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I'd like to ask the member opposite: When our government took power in June of 2018, I think we all know in the House that the previous Liberal government had spent recklessly for a decade and a half, and we were the most indebted sub-sovereign government in the entire world. That's a fact. We had an enormous debt in the province, and our government has responsibly moved back to lowering the deficit year after year, and we're now actually projecting next year to be in a slight surplus and a surplus thereafter.

I understand you may not agree with us on some of the content of the budget, but in general, does the NDP and yourself, the member opposite, support the economic path in terms of balancing the budget for the people of Ontario?

MPP Jill Andrew: You know what I'm going to say, and I'm going to say it on record here: The government can keep talking about the previous Liberal government, the previous Liberal government, the previous Liberal government until the cows come home, but they've been

in government for five years now and it's time that this Conservative government take responsibility for their actions in this House. You all have billions of dollars at your disposal that you've been hoarding, quite frankly, since the beginning of this pandemic. Do what's right. Do what's morally right. Do what is financially responsible and invest in Ontarians. Invest in our health care. Invest in our education. Invest in our housing. Get it right and stop just passing the buck to the former Liberals. They weren't great; no one's going to deny that. But guess what? You're government now, so it falls on your backs, not theirs.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you, member. It's interesting hearing the government opposite talk about our concerns with investment. We are very much in support of investing in Ontario businesses, small businesses, ensuring government money goes to support Ontario businesses.

I have a question for the minister—not yet—for the member for Toronto—St. Paul's: When you look at the budget, what did you see that's going to help the renters in your riding? I know 60% of people in your riding rent. What's in this budget for them?

MPP Jill Andrew: Thank you for that question. I will respond to that literally echoing the words of the folks I was with last night making those signs for a protest happening this weekend begging the government for more affordable housing. In this particular budget, we don't see any supports for low-income renters. We don't see supports for renters. We don't see real rent control. We don't see the removal of vacancy decontrol. We don't see some big, shiny investment in inclusionary zoning. We don't see any of the items that my constituents say to me would actually make their lives more livable—and not just livable, but dare I argue, enjoyable.

I mean, any of one of us as MPPs, how would you feel if you got a letter tomorrow saying "Get the hell out of your residence; it's being demolished. Thank you very much"? This is not fair. What do you tell the senior who has been living at 55 Brownlow for 40-odd years? Where is she supposed to go? She was shaking, speaking to me last night. Where is she supposed to go? As I said last night, maybe Queen's Park should open its doors at night. I hear they have a lot of space here at night for those who are unhoused.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Further question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member for St. Paul's for your passion for those in your riding; I know I certainly have many in mine as well. Last Saturday, I was speaking with the CEO of Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare, Bill Marra, and he actually had some kind comments about the budget. He said, "The proposed investments in children's mental health, adult mental health and addictions and supportive housing opportunity is noteworthy. By focusing on early intervention and prevention, the Ontario government's leadership is demonstrating a commitment to improving health care outcomes for all Ontarians."

Given the contrast in comments between what you shared and what I'm hearing in my community, I'm

wondering if you could elaborate a little bit as to the kinds of investments that you would prefer to see in the budget.

1640

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): A quick response.

MPP Jill Andrew: When the government member suggests a contrasting comment, I don't know if he was trying to say politely that I was lying or something of the sort. When I come to this House, I come echoing the voices that I have heard in my constituency and with stakeholders I meet with.

One thing I will tell you that I've heard from constituents and stakeholders is that they're often very intimidated when they're on Zoom meetings and when they meet with the government. Oftentimes they do have to smile and shake their head and say, "Thank you very much for the pennies you've offered us", but it doesn't meet—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Patrice Barnes): Thank you to the member.

The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: First of all, I'll be sharing my time with the great member from Barrie–Innisfil.

I'm sure most believe I'm going to speak about help for businesses, specifically our manufacturing tax credit, but there are four main points I really want to speak about. Being a small-business owner, I really do want to speak about the business side of things, but there are so many good things in this bill that I want to chat about four main points.

Last week, our government released the 2023 Ontario budget, *Building a Strong Ontario*. It is a plan that navigates ongoing global economic uncertainty, while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations, including my own children. It is our government that is building to ensure this province is the leader not only in Canada, but across the world.

Our government's plan is taking significant actions to drive growth by building Ontario's economy, such as building highways, transit and infrastructure projects, as well as training workers, keeping costs down for those who need it the most and providing better services to make life easier for people.

One area of the budget that I believe needs to be highlighted is our government's commitment and investment of \$68 million this year in a new program that connects youth in the child welfare system with additional services and supports they need to prepare for and succeed after leaving care. The Ready, Set, Go program launches April 1 and will provide youth transitioning out of care with the life skills and supports they need to pursue post-secondary education, skilled trades training and employment opportunities.

Under the new program, children's aid societies will begin focusing on helping children plan for their future at an earlier age. Starting at age 13, they will begin learning practical life skills and planned educational goals. At age 15, the emphasis will expand to financial literacy and preparing for the workforce, including managing personal

finances, setting up a bank account, grocery shopping, resumé-building, and how to access social services and other supports.

The Ready, Set, Go program will also allow youth to remain in care until the age of 23, up from the age of 21. Monthly financial support will also increase to provide youth a better quality of life and safer housing opportunities, so they can focus on their studies or working. Youth who will remain in care at the age of 21 will now receive \$1,000 per month. Youth will also be able to work up to 40 hours per week at Ontario's minimum wage without affecting their financial supports. Those pursuing a post-secondary program or training in skilled trades and apprenticeships will receive an additional \$500 a month starting at the age of 20.

The Ready, Set, Go program was developed with input and advice from former youth in care and child welfare advocate partners, and is informed by research. Our government listens. These changes were part of Ontario's plan to transform the child welfare system and help children's aid societies better prepare youth leaving care.

Speaker, this investment will transform lives. Hearing the testimonies of people such as Ingrid Palmer, chair of the Child Welfare Political Action Committee Canada and former youth in care, "By implementing the Ready, Set Go framework, the Ontario government is beginning to break down the complex barriers faced by youth from care who experience disproportionate risks and challenges throughout their lifetime. The Child Welfare PAC fully endorses this approach, which incorporates a data-driven system and a better-resourced, graduated introduction to adulthood. With multiple pathways to brighter futures and improved outcomes, this framework will help us support our most vulnerable youth and provide them with the tools they need to succeed."

Or Carina Chan, lawyer and former youth in care, who also states, "As a family/child protection lawyer and former youth in care, I understand how challenging it can be for a young person to abruptly transition out of the child welfare system. The Ready, Set, Go program gives youth a longer runway and key resources to help them thrive and reach their full potential as young adults. In addition to making it easier for youth in care to access educational employment opportunities, this framework will also allow policymakers and service providers to measure the impact of the program and to develop further initiatives that address the needs of youth in care."

Speaker, those are two people who have lived through youth care, and they are highly on board with our new system that we've set up.

As part of the 2023 budget—this one excites me more than most—*Building a Strong Ontario*, our government has invested \$3.1 million for the Ronald McDonald House Charities in Ottawa, which will enable them to officially break ground this year and get started on a much-needed expansion of 22 more bedrooms. As Christine Hardy, CEO of Ronald McDonald House Charities Ottawa, said, "Receiving this incredible \$3.1-million grant from the government of Ontario will enable our Ronald McDonald

House in Ottawa to officially break ground this year and get started on a much-needed expansion of 22 more bedrooms. We have been operating since 1984 with just 14 bedrooms. We are always at full capacity and desperately need to grow to reflect the diverse needs of our communities we serve and to reduce our wait-list. When families stay at the house, it is because their child is receiving urgent critical medical care far from home, often for months, and in some cases years at a time. It is my honour to speak on behalf of all Ronald McDonald House Ottawa region families with sick children when I say thank you. Having this kind of recognition from the government of Ontario is truly helping us make room for all families.”

The fact that they’ve had 14 bedrooms since 1984—Madam Speaker, I was one year old at that time, so this is a long-needed expansion of the Ronald McDonald House. I’ve had friends who have had to use their services, and they cannot speak highly enough about them and the pressure it takes off them when their children are sick. This is positive news, not only for my residents of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry but also for residents in the north who utilize CHEO for exceptional care.

Our government is hard at work, and this 2023 budget has highlighted just how we are committed to tackling the staffing shortages in health care. I’m a numbers guy, so I’ll share—and probably bore the members with—the stats. We are investing \$200 million this fiscal year to expand supports to address immediate health care staffing shortages, as well as to grow the workforce in years to come.

We are supporting up to 3,150 internationally educated nurses to become accredited nurses in Ontario through the Supervised Practice Experience Partnership program. More than 2,000 internationally educated nurses have already enrolled in this program and 1,300 of them are already fully registered and practising in Ontario.

We’re offering up to 6,000 health care students training opportunities to work in hospitals providing care and gaining practical experience as they continue their education through the Enhanced Extern Program. This program has offered these opportunities to over 5,000 health care students already.

Ontario is continuing to hire more health care workers, to ensure everyone can see a trained professional when they need to. Key new investments this fiscal year to build the health care workforce include: \$4.3 million to help 50 internationally trained physicians get licensed here in Ontario; \$22 million to hire up to 200 hospital preceptors to provide mentorship to newly graduated nurses; and \$15 million to help 100 mid-to-late-career nurses continue to be in the workforce.

Speaker, as part of our government’s plan to connect people to care closer to home, the province is expanding the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant to add more health care professionals in underserved and growing communities like my own riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

In addition to nursing programs, the grant will now include paramedic and medical laboratory technologist programs in priority communities like my own.

As the province makes it a priority to increase access to doctors and expand undergraduate and postgraduate medical training seats across the province, our government is doubling the previous investment of \$42.5 million over two years, with an additional \$100.8 million over the next three years to expand and accelerate the rollout of undergraduate and postgraduate seats. This will result in an additional 160 undergraduate positions and 295 postgraduate positions by 2028.

Once again, Speaker, we understand just how important the growing need for mental health and addictions services and programs is in this province. Therefore, Ontario launched the Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario’s Mental Health and Addictions Systems, to better connect people to mental health services that are convenient for them. Building on this historical investment of \$3.8 million over 10 years, the government is providing an additional \$425 million over three years, a 5% increase in base funding, mainly to:

1650

- support mental health and addictions services across the province that are easy to access where and when they are needed;

- support children and youth by providing access to mental health and addictions services, primary care and social and community supports;

- maintain supportive housing and services for people living with mental health and addictions challenges as they transition from hospital to the community;

- support children and youth suffering from eating disorders; and

- work with Indigenous partners and communities to support Indigenous people’s access to high-quality, culturally appropriate care.

This investment will provide community-based mental health and addictions service providers funds that are funded by the Ministry of Health.

Camille Quenneville, CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario, said, “The vital structural base funding commitment announced today is the largest by any government for community mental health and addictions care in a decade. It will significantly help community-based mental health and addictions agencies provide high-quality care, retain dedicated and committed staff, and address rising operating costs. The budget is an overwhelmingly positive sign that the government understands the strain our sector is facing as we support Ontarians living with mental health and addictions challenges. It also demonstrates their desire to help the most vulnerable in society.”

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Report continues in volume B.

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Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Parsa, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	Minister of Children, Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires
Pasma, Chandra (NDP)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Piccini, Hon. / L'hon. David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Hon. / L'hon. Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery / Ministre des Services au public et aux entreprises
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Président du Conseil du Trésor
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
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	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	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	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Housing / Ministre associée du Logement
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	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	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Vaugeois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	

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West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	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	Kanata—Carleton	