

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
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**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

F-25

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

F-25

**Standing Committee on  
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Building a Strong Ontario Act  
(Budget Measures), 2023

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Tuesday 25 April 2023

**Comité permanent  
des finances  
et des affaires économiques**

Loi de 2023 visant à bâtir  
un Ontario fort  
(mesures budgétaires)

1<sup>re</sup> session  
43<sup>e</sup> législature

Mardi 25 avril 2023

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Chair: Ernie Hardeman  
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Président : Ernie Hardeman  
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Tuesday 25 April 2023

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES  
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Mardi 25 avril 2023

*The committee met at 0901 in room 151.*

**BUILDING A STRONG ONTARIO ACT  
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2023  
LOI DE 2023 VISANT À BÂTIR  
UN ONTARIO FORT  
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)**

Consideration 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 Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We are meeting today to begin public hearings on Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER  
AND RESPONSES/DÉCLARATION  
MINISTÉRIELLE ET RÉPONSE**

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** I now call on the Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance, as our first witness. Welcome. Minister, you will have up to 20 minutes for your presentation, followed by 40 minutes of questions from the members of the committee. The questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of five minutes for the independent members of the committee as a group.

Minister, with that, the floor is yours. The last one we went through like this—I just want to remind everyone that the time for questions does belong to the questioner, so when the presenters are asked to finish their answer and get on with the next question, we ask the questioned to be doing that. Thank you.

With that, we will turn the floor over to you, Minister.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone. I'm pleased to be here today before you at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to discuss the Building a Strong Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2023. I must begin by thanking you, the members of this committee and the Chair. Your collective

hard work is crucial and appreciated, as the approval of proposed legislative and regulatory changes is key to effective governance.

Transparency and accountability are also key ingredients necessary for any functioning democracy in the federation, which is of course why I'm here with you all today. I'm pleased to discuss the Building a Strong Ontario Act, 2023, a plan that takes a responsible and targeted approach to supporting people and businesses while outlining a path to balance the budget next year so that future generations can inherit a strong Ontario. This plan is our blueprint for building a strong province during a time of global challenge and change, and our work to build that Ontario starts now.

Je suis heureux de discuter de la Loi de 2023 visant à bâtir un Ontario fort, un plan qui se veut une approche responsable et ciblée pour équilibrer le budget d'aujourd'hui afin que les futures générations héritent un Ontario fort. Ce plan entamera les mesures prises pour bâtir une province forte au cours d'une période caractérisée par des défis et des changements à l'échelle mondiale, et le travail à faire pour bâtir cet Ontario commence dès maintenant.

This budget outlines a plan to build a strong economy for today and for tomorrow by attracting investments and creating jobs. It is a plan that builds highways, roads, transit, schools and hospitals. It is a plan to train workers for better jobs and bigger paycheques. It is a plan to build a strong health care system that connects people to convenient care, all while returning Ontario to a balanced budget next year, thanks to robust revenue growth, prudence, disciplined planning and clear priorities.

Let me be clear: In 2023-24, we plan to reduce the deficit to \$1.3 billion, and by next year we will return Ontario to the black with a modest surplus of about \$200 million, followed by a \$4.4-billion surplus projected by 2025-26. With this progress, the people of Ontario can have confidence that tomorrow will be better than today.

Mr. Chair, through this budget we are delivering more peace of mind and security to workers, businesses, families and individuals, because while Ontario's economy remains resilient, the seas around us are stormy. That is why our budget reflects continued prudence and planning assumptions that leave room for future surprises or shocks. I will note here that these assumptions are based on an in-depth consultation with leading private-sector economists, who do expect an economic rebound next year. With a \$4-billion contingency fund and a \$1-billion reserve for 2023-24, we

have room to react to whatever uncertainties may lie ahead. This reflects the government's cautious, prudent and responsible fiscal planning.

There are, in my opinion, plenty of reasons to be optimistic. Despite the turbulence of the past year, we are doing better than most, but the world continues to face economic headwinds as well as ongoing and emerging global changes and challenges, be they political, social, technological, business or health-related. Everywhere they look, the people of Ontario can find reasons to be concerned about the state of the world and their place in it. That is why we acted early to help keep costs down. We eliminated licence plate renewal fees as well as licence plate stickers, and refunded two years' worth of fees for eligible vehicles. We cut the gas tax and the fuel rate tax until the end of this year. We eliminated double fares for GO Transit and local transit throughout much of the greater Golden Horseshoe, and we are working to expand this initiative to include Toronto so that a commuter coming into the city only pays one fare per trip.

We are also supporting those who need our support the most by temporarily doubling the Guaranteed Annual Income System, known as GAINS, payments for eligible low-income seniors through to the end of the year. Through this legislation, we are proposing to expand eligibility for the program so that an additional 100,000 seniors will be eligible for the program, and we are proposing to index the GAINS benefit to inflation, starting in July 2024—something no previous government has ever done. Our government will give a hand up to those who need it the most.

Sadly, Mr. Chair, many around us do not have a roof over their head or a place to call home. Our government continues to be there for these neighbours. It is why we are making a historic investment of an additional \$202 million each year in supportive housing and homelessness programs to provide not only a hand up but hope for a better life for those who need it most.

Mr. Chair, Ontario's future and potential remain strong. The province's population is more than 15 million people now—in fact, at Statistics Canada, I believe it was about 15.36 million—and more than 275,000 people annually are expected to move to Ontario. With this growth, Ontario requires strong infrastructure. So as part of our historic 10-year infrastructure plan, we're spending almost \$28 billion on highways. This is very much an investment in more livable and affordable communities that allow safer, more comfortable and more convenient commutes. We're also continuing to make large new investments in transit, including increasing GO service to Niagara from Union Station and bringing back the Northlander from Timmins to Toronto. And we are making progress on the Ontario Line. We're also investing in new schools, child care spaces, hospitals and long-term care. Our plan to build is a plan to both build new hospitals and expand existing ones. It is a plan to build safe and comfortable long-term-care homes across the province.

Now, while all signs point to a brighter future ahead, success is not guaranteed. We must take a responsible and flexible approach. That is why we have a plan to build a

strong, more resilient and more competitive economy right here at home.

Bien que tout porte à croire que l'avenir sera meilleur, la réussite n'est pas garantie. Nous devons adopter une approche responsable et souple. C'est pourquoi nous avons un plan pour bâtir une économie vigoureuse, plus résiliente et plus compétitive ici même dans la province.

#### 0910

The Ring of Fire is one of the most promising mineral deposits in the world, potentially home to the critical minerals essential to create batteries, electronics, electric vehicles and other clean tech. That is why our government is working with First Nations communities in northern Ontario to build partnerships that will ensure both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can benefit from these untapped riches. We are taking a comprehensive approach to accelerate the safe development of mineral resources in northern Ontario with \$1 billion of additional funding to unlock these critical minerals. We've announced an additional \$3 million in funding to the Ontario Junior Exploration Program this year and next year to incentivize and encourage exploration. And we plan on reopening the Mining Act to ensure this piece of legislation addresses the issues of today while ensuring we have a truly competitive jurisdiction to attract future investment in our promising mineral sector.

We also have a plan, once these materials have been mined, to be able to move them to southern Ontario. I am, of course, talking about connecting these resources to Ontario's world-class manufacturing sector. Take Oshawa for example, a city that is benefiting from part of GM's more than \$2-billion investment that will protect thousands of jobs; or Richmond Hill, where Tesla is manufacturing equipment to help make the batteries of the future; or Alliston, where Honda is making a \$1.4-billion investment to make hybrid vehicles.

In Oakville—I'll repeat that, in Oakville—Ford is making a \$1.8-billion investment to produce electric vehicles. ArcelorMittal Dofasco in Hamilton is making a \$1.8-billion investment in producing clean green steel, including for the auto sector. In Cambridge and Woodstock, two proud auto towns, Toyota has invested \$1.4 billion to make vehicles, including hybrids; or Ingersoll, where GM is building Canada's first ever full-scale electric vehicle manufacturing plant; or Windsor, where Stellantis and LG Energy Solution are investing more than \$5 billion to build Ontario's first ever large-scale EV battery manufacturing plant, with 2,500 new jobs; or St. Thomas, the future of Volkswagen's first ever overseas battery cell plant. All told, Mr. Chair, these are part of more than \$17 billion in investments by global automakers and suppliers of electric vehicle batteries and battery materials that Ontario has attracted over the past two and a half years.

Ontario is now the heartland of Canada's electric vehicle revolution. It took a lot of rebuilding, but Ontario manufacturing is back.

To keep momentum going, we have introduced the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, a 10% tax credit to help more Canadian-controlled private corporations expand, innovate, become more competitive

and create new jobs. And we must continue to find ways to boost Ontario's competitiveness. That is why our government is working with partners to have shovel-ready industrial sites available for new manufacturing projects, and we are already seeing success with this as evidenced by Volkswagen's recent announcement.

Now, Mr. Chair, we cannot thrive if we don't have people filling those jobs. This government knows we need construction workers, health care workers and workers in the skilled trades. Ontario, quite simply, needs more skilled workers, and we are committed to doing the most we can to help attract people to jobs and to shore up skills.

It starts with investing more money to help more workers upgrade their skills or transition into the skilled careers that need them. The Skills Development Fund has been an unqualified success in helping nearly 400,000 workers gain the skills they need to find better jobs and more stable careers in the sectors that badly need them. Through a \$75-million investment over the next three years in the Skills Development Fund, we are training workers with skills they need so they can have stable careers in the skilled trades. We're also investing \$224 million in a new capital stream of the Skills Development Fund to partner with private-sector unions and other partners so they can upgrade and expand union halls and other training centres. Because, Mr. Chair, we know that to give more workers more opportunities, we also have to give them more modern spaces where they can learn and where they can train. We are working with private-sector unions and other partners to upgrade their training facilities so that workers can get their best possible training.

We know that more skilled immigrants have to be part of the solution. As the child of Hungarian immigrants—refugees, in fact—I know first-hand how Canada and Ontario have transformed the lives of so many people in their hour of need. We're investing an additional \$25 million over three years in the Ontario immigration nominee program to ensure we can help immigrants hit the ground running. And we're going to expedite the training of more health care workers through expanding access to dual-credit opportunities to provide more students with a head start in their journey to becoming nurses, personal support workers, paramedics or medical laboratory technicians.

Now, while I'm on the subject of health care, I want to note that we are investing every single dollar we received from the federal government's health care funding down payment and a whole lot more into better health care services. Overall, since the 2022 Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review, Ontario's health sector investments are increasing by an additional \$15.3 billion over the next three years. Through the 2022 budget, the government announced a plan to invest over three years to get more people connected to care in the comfort of their own home and community. And our government is now accelerating investments to bring funding in 2023-24 to \$569 million, including nearly \$300 million to stabilize the home and community care workforce.

This funding will also expand home care services, making it easier and faster for people to connect to care.

We're also investing more than \$200 million to connect children and youth to care at hospitals and close to home in their communities. To make care more convenient for people and families, pharmacists will soon be able to prescribe medication to treat more common ailments that they are qualified to do. And we are investing in independent health facilities to speed up care while ensuring patients will always pay with their OHIP card, not with their credit card.

Our plan includes the hiring and training of thousands of more health care workers, including schools. We are adding 154 postgraduate medical training seats to give first priority to Ontario residents trained at home and abroad beginning in 2024 and going forward. We will also add 100 seats for medical undergraduates and continue to prioritize Ontario students for these spots.

Now, Mr. Chair, instead of delivering broad one-time support that could risk worsening inflation, our government is taking a different path. Our 2023 budget is a plan that navigates ongoing global economic uncertainty with a responsible, targeted approach to help people and businesses today, while laying a strong fiscal foundation for future generations. Our plan is taking significant actions to drive growth by lowering costs, getting key infrastructure projects built faster and attracting more jobs and investments to help businesses, families and workers. It's a thoughtful, transparent approach to balance the budget and deliver support to those families and those workers and those businesses in Ontario, and we will continue with this approach that is building an Ontario that this province can be proud of, not only for today but for the future.

Dans le cadre de notre plan, d'importantes mesures sont prises pour stimuler la croissance en baissant les coûts pour réaliser plus rapidement des projets d'infrastructure clés et pour attirer plus d'emplois et d'investissements afin d'aider les entreprises, les familles et les travailleurs. Il s'agit d'une approche réfléchie et transparente pour équilibrer le budget et offrir du soutien aux familles, aux travailleurs et aux entreprises des quatre coins de l'Ontario. Et nous conservons cette approche qui permet de bâtir en Ontario, en le faisant la fierté de la population de la province, non seulement aujourd'hui, mais aussi à l'avenir.

This is our plan to build an Ontario that will continue to have a resilient economy, an Ontario that has the best infrastructure in place and skilled workers trained for the jobs of tomorrow, an Ontario that connects people to the care you need and has a bright future for Ontarians today and for generations to come, an Ontario that is strong.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I thank you.

**0920**

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation. We will start the first round of questioning with the official opposition. I remind everyone that at the one-minute mark, I will say, "One minute," and at the end of the time, I will say, "Thank you," and we'll move on.

With that, MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, for being here. You started off your comments

this morning saying that transparency and accountability are key to our democracy. There has been a disturbing trend in the finances of the province of Ontario, and you've heard me speak about this—and it's actually been identified, as well, by the Financial Accountability Officer—with regard to contingency funds. But the transparency and accountability piece is now at a new height of concern, I think, for all Ontarians.

I realize that as you were crafting this budget, the sale of the long-term lease for Ontario Place was in question, as was, potentially, the moving of the science centre. There are many questions pertaining to this budget and the cost of the Ontario Place decisions, especially as it just was released last week that now the science centre is going to be removed, destroyed and somehow transplanted down to Ontario Place. So I have some questions for you around transparency.

Often, when a property is leased, the lease is registered on title. Given that Ontario Place is a government-owned property—many of us think of it as a gem—will the minister now provide the entire lease, including all attachments and addenda, so that the people of this province can know what this 95-year lease means to them in the long term?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you for the question. I'll address the transparency, the centre and the lease. First off, on transparency, you couldn't be more wrong. You couldn't be more wrong about transparency.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Then, release the lease.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** You know, folks, I come from the private sector, where you go out every 90 days—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** This is not the private sector.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:**—and you tell your shareholders—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'm going to reclaim my time. I asked a question, if he would release the lease—

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** You asked a question, and you made a claim about transparency—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Well, release it, then.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:**—and I'm going to answer a question about transparency. I'm going to answer a question about Ontario Place and the lease.

But on transparency: We're out every 90 days telling the people not only how we spent their money, but how we are continuing to spend their money. I can't think of a more transparent and accountable way to do that. I've stood up five times on the public accounts—the public accounts that are audited by the Auditor General, with a clean opinion, five times in a row. That's an independent arm of government, looking at our books and saying, "Is this a true picture of the?"—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much. I am reclaiming my time, because I didn't mention public accounts, but that's a whole other mess with regard to this—

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Well, it relates to transparency, so I'm just going to continue to push back on the lack of transparency.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** My question is, what was the catalyst for your government, then, to decide it could entrust this

Ontario Place/science centre debacle to an Austrian company's Canadian subsidiary? What gives the cabinet special knowledge that this lessee or even its parent company will be standing and paying rent 95 years from now? Speak to the 95 years, please. Like, where did this come from?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** You will have to ask the Minister of Infrastructure, and I'm not going to go into any—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It has financial implications for the province of Ontario.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:**—commercial aspects of that transaction, but I will say this about Ontario Place: It's been dormant for years. It's been not utilized at all. In fact, the previous government wanted to put casinos on there. The previous government wanted to put condos on there. We're bringing it back for families, not just for Ontario families but families right across this planet, who can enjoy the outdoors, who can enjoy a science centre, who can enjoy a waterfront and a spa, who can enjoy entertain—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you. I'm reclaiming my time.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:**—and bring that back to the people of Ontario.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much. The people of this province, Minister, did not raise the issue of a massive spa. The people of this province and of Toronto have not been calling out for a glamorous, luxurious spa; they have not been. And the people of Flemingdon Park really do value the science centre where it is right now. There was no consultation, and that speaks to transparency. These decisions have been made arbitrarily and the lease and the terms and conditions of how these decisions were made were made, I'm assuming, in cabinet, behind closed doors, without public consultation.

Based on the published reports, the agreement is formatted as a lease, though in reality, it's very similar to the 407. It's a sale; it's a de facto sale of public property to a private corporation. And why the 95 years? Certainly you can speak to that, because you've just mentioned you're from the private sector. You have lots of private sector experience. What company, what entity would ever sign on to a 95-year lease? It does not provide the ability to be flexible, to adapt to changing economic conditions. A standard lease in the private sector is 20 years. Why 95 years?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** What I talk about in the budget is revitalizing Ontario Place. I do not talk about commercial transactions in the budget. I think we're here to talk about the budget, Chair.

As I said, we're not going to sit idle. We're consulting with numerous stakeholders, including the people up in Thorncliffe and others—the minister has been very clear about that—and we're going to get things done, because for too long, things have not gotten done in Ontario Place. It's laid dormant, and that's what the people want.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Just to be clear, then: The lease is signed, the de facto sale is done. There's no recourse for the province of Ontario—because this will have financial impacts on the economy of this province and on future



generations. So I just need you to confirm this is a complete done deal with no way for the people of the province to reclaim this land for themselves.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** I'm going to defer you to the Minister of Infrastructure to go through any specific questions you may have, which you're also free to ask in the House. I'm here to talk about what's in the budget, and in the budget, we have a 10-year infrastructure plan to build infrastructure, which includes Ontario Place, which includes bringing the services and infrastructure necessary to move this province forward.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Well, I appreciate that, however—and we will be asking questions, because the people of Ontario deserve to get answers on this, and this circles back—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** —to your comments around transparency and accountability.

Yesterday, Minister Surma's—who you've referenced here—comments in the Legislature suggest that there are fixed annual payments of rent. My question for you as the finance minister: Are those annual payments fixed or tied to inflation?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Again, I refer you to the Minister of Infrastructure for any specific details about commercial contracts. Again, I'm here to—I'll answer any questions about the budget.

I'll come back to transparency. I think that we'll continue to—including our budget that we went out with to the people of Ontario, we're very transparent about telling the people of Ontario how we plan to spend their money, how to move this province forward and how to build a stronger Ontario—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I need to say the people of this province are disappointed—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go on to the independents. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you for being here this morning. In the spirit of transparency, can you tell us why the government is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on a spa instead of spending money on setting up a corporation with a deliberate purpose, a purpose-built corporation, to build affordable housing in Ontario?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Again, this vision for Ontario Place, as I said earlier, is to bring it back to life. It has been dormant. It was shut down, I believe, in 2012, so it's almost a decade that people have not enjoyed it.

We can debate about this, that or the other thing, but at the end of the day, what this government is doing is, it's got a plan. It's talking to the people of Ontario about that plan. It is going to move forward, and what we hear constantly from the people of Ontario is they are asking us to get things done. There is a lot of support for doing that.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I'm going to interrupt here. Again, as the official opposition member has mentioned, there was no support for building a spa. No one was asked about building a spa, so I'm going to debate you on that

point. I think it's clear that this government is prioritizing things like building spas over building affordable housing, and I think the budget shows that.

You use the words “transparency” and “accountability” a lot. Could you please be transparent about the budget? How much is in this budget for legal fees to fight laws that the courts have found unconstitutional, such as hiding mandate letters, Bill 124? I want the specific number that's in the budget.

**0930**

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** First off, it is our responsibility, on behalf of the taxpayers of Ontario, to make sure we defend the taxpayer of Ontario and use the means in a free and democratic society to ensure that we are good stewards of the taxpayers' money.

As you would know, there are ongoing cases—since 1867, I'm sure, till right now—that are before the government of the day, some that have been going on for a long period of time that move from one government to another, and we continue to robustly, where we feel it's appropriate, defend the taxpayers and citizens of this province.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I'd like the number, please, Minister. I'd like the number that's in the budget for the legal fees—

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** You want to get into very specific questions—

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I'd like you to be very clear about the number that's in the budget for legal fees, because there is a budget for that.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** I'll pass it to the deputy for any specific numbers that you're looking for—

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** That would be great. Thank you.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** —but I will again reiterate that we're very focused on making sure the taxpayers and the citizens are defended in this province.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I appreciate that. I'm not sure the education workers and nurses feel you're defending their rights when you go to court to suppress their rights.

Does the deputy minister have that number?

**Mr. Greg Orencsak:** Sure. Deputy Minister Greg Orencsak—for the purposes of Hansard.

MPP Bowman, as you may be aware, expenditure estimates were tabled in the Legislative Assembly, and it's the Legislative Assembly's responsibility and opportunity to review the expenditure estimates on a ministry-by-ministry basis. If you're interested in a specific line item that is in an expenditure estimate of the Ministry of Attorney General, then I would think that would be the most appropriate venue for you to raise that. That number that you're looking for may be in the estimates, but it's not part of the budget.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I think the Minister of Finance should know how much is going to be spent on legal fees out of taxpayer money, and I think the taxpayers deserve to know that number.

**Mr. Greg Orencsak:** And that's why those figures would be appropriately included in the estimates of the ministry that's incurring those expenses—

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** So might I take it that the minister or the deputy minister is not willing to share that number at this committee?

**Mr. Greg Orensak:** That would be incorrect, and that would be a misrepresentation of what I just told you, MPP Bowman—

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Absolutely, absolutely—that's out of order, Chair, completely out of order.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** No, I think the budget—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** If I could just stop it for a moment.

I think it's appropriate that when questions are asked, that the questioner does not interrupt the answer, and they also don't get to decide whether they like the answer. The answer is the one they get. I would make sure that we are fair to the presenters, too.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Okay. I will restate my question.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** With that, we can—

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** What legal fees—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** —that up in the next round. Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the government side, MPP Crawford.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister and deputy minister for being here today. Certainly I want to start off with thanking you for bringing out what I think is a fantastic budget that is rebuilding Ontario.

I can tell you, as a high school and university student I worked at Ontario Place, and I'm so excited to see the vision for what the government has brought forward to revitalize it after years and years of neglect. It's bringing back good memories.

With that, I did want to ask the minister about the manufacturing tax credit. As we are aware, the province of Ontario came from a very dark period where we lost over 300,000 manufacturing jobs. The previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, basically threw off manufacturing as not necessary. "It's not the wave of the future. We're going to go to a service economy. Manufacturing is dead here in Ontario." And they gave up on that sector.

There could be nothing further from the truth today. We are undergoing a manufacturing renaissance in Ontario, and I think, certainly, a major component of and the reason for that is the government encouraging this and creating the right environment for these businesses to flourish here in Ontario, to want to attract investments and jobs.

Manufacturing is growing. We now have a shortage of workers. You touched on all the new manufacturing facilities and the ones that are being revitalized, including in my own riding of Oakville. I want to thank you on behalf of the people of Oakville about that major revitalization which people are absolutely thrilled about.

But could you touch on the manufacturing tax credit? Given that Ontario is doing well and is getting investments in manufacturing, why did you see that you needed to take even a further step to give this manufacturing tax credit to private companies to encourage even more investment here?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you, MPP Crawford, and thank you for your great work in your riding and as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance. I thank you for that.

You're absolutely right. We embarked on a plan in 2018 to boost the economy, to bring back good-paying jobs and bigger paycheques into Ontario. That plan started right from day one.

Now, we've gone through a pandemic; we've seen supply chains disrupted; we've seen Russia invade Ukraine; we've seen geopolitical risks that we have not seen; we've seen inflation and interest rates—which have all brought to the fore how important it is to have food security, energy security and job security in Ontario and in Canada. So our investments to not only attract capital but to attract labour, to invest in that labour and in capital are absolutely essential to having a more prosperous and stronger Ontario.

With regard to the manufacturing investment tax credit, this is for Canadian-controlled private corporations, because we know that the direct jobs that you referenced in Oakville and other places right across Ontario are direct jobs, but a whole network of supply chain builds up around it. We want to incent capital to form—they're the risk takers. Government doesn't create the jobs. We don't hire the people. We can create the conditions for that economic growth.

This is part of our plan to encourage that capital investment in a world where things have changed—and not just outside of North America, inside North America, in the US, with the Inflation Reduction Act, which is a significant policy shift in just the last 12 months. It requires us to continue to invest in Canadian companies, in Ontario-based companies, and the manufacturing investment tax credit will help do that. It was roundly endorsed by institutions like the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters organization and the chambers of commerce right across the province. So we are doing it, and ultimately, government is not going to create the wealth and the jobs and the prosperity; it's the private sector, it's capital investments, risk takers. That's what that tax credit is intended to do.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** That's great. Thank you very much.

How much time left, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Three point one.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay, thank you.

I'd like to move on to a different topic. This is a topic that unfortunately I never hear the opposition talking about—that's five years in the legislature that I've been, since 2018—and that's the fiscal situation of the province and the debt and the deficits that we have.

I know that in 2018, when our government took office, we inherited the largest sub-sovereign debt in the entire world. We had a huge deficit and debt piling up year by year. I wanted to get a sense from you as to why you think it's important to balance the budget—because as I look through the budget, we're projecting to be back in the black in 12 to 18 months, which I think is great news for the people of Ontario. The people of Ontario want responsible government. They want the government to balance

the books just like they do themselves in their own spending. So could you give us some insight into how you've been able to get us on that trajectory and why it's important to balance the budget?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you again for the question. I think a lot about what we can do today to hand to the next generation of leaders a better Ontario. That relates to health care. That relates to a more robust economy. It relates to education. It relates to better jobs. Of course, a part of that is the fiscal health of the province.

When we came into power, Ontario was the highest-indebted province in Canada in terms of debt-to-GDP. We had the highest debt-to-GDP. We had the lowest credit ratings in the province's history, which we inherited from previous administrations. That is not responsible. We cannot hand a weak fiscal hand to the next generation. You have to be prepared for uncertainties: economic uncertainties, pandemics, whatever is out there. It is so important, if we're going to be stewards of the public purse, to be responsible—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** —not waiting for tomorrow but doing that today. So we do have a plan, a fiscal plan, as outlined in the budget, to get us to that point. I'm very proud of that.

And I would point out that other provinces like BC and Quebec and the government in Ottawa do not have a path to balance. I think if you're going to have a plan to build Ontario, you owe it to the people to continue to be transparent about how we're spending their money, how we're doing with their money, how we plan on continuing investing for their future, and being fiscally responsible on a path to balance is absolutely critical in my mind if we are to be proper stewards, not just for today but for future generations.

0940

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** In balancing the budget, did the government do this by—the opposition claims that it's by cuts, but, correct me if I'm wrong, the budget today is the largest in the history of Ontario.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Well, as you increase budgets, they will always be the largest, as long as you're not cutting expenditures, and most governments don't reduce expenditures—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** We heard loud and clear during budget consultations—and you received this information via the budget report from this committee—that housing was the number one issue, followed quickly by health care. Of course, housing is health care in Ontario, especially when you don't have it.

We heard from AMO in particular. The government talks about supply and demand. This is what AMO said about the budget's response. They said, "The provincial government's assertion that the housing supply crisis can be solved by limiting municipal access to infrastructure funding, eliminating environmental protections or changes to municipal governance is unsound.

"Unless the costs of Bill 23 are fully offset by the province, it will account to a transfer of a billion dollars a year from the pockets of property taxpayers, including low-income property taxpayers, into the pockets of developers with little prospect of improved affordability."

Now, 444 municipalities are not wrong on this, Minister. Why did your budget not address the key issue of housing supply, housing affordability, and why are you down-loading these further costs to citizens in the province of Ontario?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you again for the question, and you've touched on a very important issue. A very important issue is how we build the supply of housing necessary to accommodate a fast-growing population in Ontario. People around the world are coming to Ontario. Families are staying in Ontario. People want to work in this province and live in this province. Housing is so critical, so thank you for raising that. Those same—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** But why did you not make municipalities whole? That's what they asked for, and you know that.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Those same municipalities that you quote, virtually all of them, have endorsed and agreed to the targets set to build. Now, we can't do it alone. We need the help and support of the municipalities. As you well know, there is a dialogue going on with each municipality, starting with the city of Toronto, to go through the books and mutually work together to make sure that we can together hit those targets. That is—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'll reclaim my time. The specific question was, the minister said he would promise to make municipalities whole, he would financially make up the difference that Bill 23 penalizes municipalities for—I'm trying to understand why you had the opportunity with this budget and you failed to do so.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Not at all; in fact, just the opposite. We've announced that through Bill 23, through support for infrastructure in this budget—and the minister has been clear—that there's a process to get those houses built. Maybe the NDP's view is to throw a lot of money at everything, and that will solve everything over time; that is not the way to do it.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Actually, we would invest, and if we made the promise of investment, we would get the money out the door.

I'm going to pass it over to my colleague MPP Begum.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Begum.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Good morning, Minister. Thank you for being here this morning. I just want to follow up on one of the questions my colleague was asking earlier. It's in regard to the science centre. Do you know how many tourist attractions, public spaces like that we have across North York and Scarborough?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** I do not have that at my fingertips.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** That's okay. Just about two: the Toronto Zoo and the science centre. Across Scarborough's six ridings, as well as across North York, we don't have a lot of these kinds of spaces. So what gives your

government the right to take away the Ontario Science Centre and put it in a space where there are existing attraction spaces like that?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you for the question, MPP Begum. I appreciate that. As I said earlier, at the outset, what's worse is when you do nothing. People have been asking and looking at Ontario Place as a destination to bring back families and people, not just to Toronto, not just to North York, but all of Ontario. People can come to a space that will be family-friendly, that will be exciting, that will revitalize and reimagine the space. And the Ontario Science Centre is part of that plan and it's part of our vision that combining the science centre with the entertainment, the water park and the public spaces in Ontario Place is the way forward—

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Minister, I just want to reclaim my time. I completely agree with you in regard to that it does have the capacity to attract people, to revitalize the community. A lot of the businesses in that area thrive right now because of the science centre. You're taking away a very critical piece that exists within our community and removing it to a community that already is thriving. We could do other things with it. You could create that public space. Why not invest in communities like North York that are already marginalized, that are already struggling? Why not invest in it there, as it is there already? And why waste so much of public dollars to actually take something that exists, that's already thriving, and pick it up and then remove it to a different location?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Let me put it another way. Why not join us with reimagining that space up there, while you have—

**Ms. Doly Begum:** It's about equity as well.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** You're going to have two intersecting transit lines, right by the Don Valley Parkway as well: three major arteries. Why not we reimagine that space and make it even better for all Ontarians, and particularly the residents of North York?

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I disagree, Minister, because I think we have to also invest in our communities that are struggling and we have to be very equitable in the ways we—

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** And that is part of the plan.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** And that plan is not equitable.

I want to move on to something that you mentioned in your remarks earlier, which is, "When workers thrive, we thrive," or something along those lines. Why is your government, then, spending people's hard-earned money to fight health care workers in court?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** One minute, one minute?

Thank you, again. We've been supporting workers right across the province, and we'll continue to support workers—

**Ms. Doly Begum:** So fighting them in court is supporting workers?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** I'm not going to comment on something before the courts, but I will say this: We are supporting not just health care workers, but education

workers, skilled trades, people right across the spectrum of workers.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** We know how education workers feel about that as well.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** We've introduced, through the budget, a number of initiatives to increase the number of health care workers. We've supported, even in grades 11 and 12, the dual credit program—

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I just have one final question. I know I have a very limited amount of time. You're spending some of the highest amounts of dollars ever in this budget, and yet you have deviated so far from the times of Bill Davis. How is it that you're spending so much money in a budget and yet doing so little for the people—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

Onto the next question. MPP Brady.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Thank you to the minister and deputy minister for appearing this morning. I represent the riding of Haldimand-Norfolk. Norfolk county was once known as Ontario's tobacco belt.

We all know the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and higher taxes were once thought to be the way to curb people's smoking habits. We all know that hasn't worked. All it's done is drive the industry underground, which is spiralling out of control. Tobacco has become one of the most common illegally traded goods in the world, and this province is ground zero, with sales of illegal product on par with El Salvador.

During pre-budget consultations, we did hear from folks who recognize the damage that illegal tobacco is doing to the social fabric of our communities as well as to our economy. We know that it threatens the safety of our communities, because we know that those who are moving illegal tobacco are organized crime, involved in drugs, guns and human trafficking.

Quebec has a model which has proven to be the recipe to deal with contraband tobacco—and I will point out that this province alone misses out on about \$750 million annually in lost tobacco tax revenue. I understand, in the 2019 budget, that the Quebec model was actually prepared and ready to be in that budget. Can you explain to me who or why or what was the reason it was pulled from the 2019 budget and why it doesn't appear in the 2023 budget?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Well, thank you for that question. I know how important that is in your riding and in the area, and it is an important issue right across the province. So thank you for raising that.

With regard to 2019, you'd have to ask the principles involved in that. I was not finance minister at that time, but what I can tell you is we take this area of illegal tobacco very seriously. That's why, including in budget 2023, we've continued to introduce measures through enforcement, through various updates to the Tobacco Tax Act, to ease the administrative burden. It's an area that we continue to look at because we understand the impact that it has across many jurisdictions. We'll continue to work

with law enforcement. We'll continue to work with First Nations, and we'll continue to actively advance this file.

0950

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Okay. Thank you very much. So for that question, I have to go back to, I guess, the previous minister and ask why that was pulled.

Other provinces are currently sounding the alarm, and they're not happy with the government's track record on contraband tobacco. In 2014, the federal government actually amended the Criminal Code of Canada in Bill C-10 to create a new offence of trafficking contraband tobacco and to provide for minimum penalties of imprisonment for repeat offenders. It allowed police to enforce the illicit trade. When this government came to power, one of the first things the Minister of Finance did was change the wording from "contraband" to "unregulated." You mentioned that, yes, page 184 of your budget makes reference to the Tobacco Tax Act, but why would the ministry change the definition from "contraband" to "unregulated"?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** In 2014?

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** It was 2019, I believe,

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** It was 2019? I'll ask the deputy if he can weigh in on—

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Your budget, the 2023 budget, contains an ambiguous term, "unregulated," which law enforcement tells me makes it very difficult for them to enforce contraband tobacco. You said earlier that we're here to defend the taxpayer. Shouldn't the government make it easier for law enforcement to actually curb contraband tobacco, rather than make it easier for criminals to move illegal tobacco?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** We are continuing to address it. We're working with First Nations. We're working at the community level on community safety. We're working on the economic impacts of that. We're working with enforcement, giving them more and more tools.

With regard to the specifics of a definition, I'll just pass it to the deputy on the definition.

**Mr. Greg Orencsak:** I would just support the minister's comments in terms of working with law enforcement in partnership and in respect of illegal tobacco. In terms of the terms that are being used with respect to illegal tobacco and contraband, it reflects some of the partnership approaches that we have both with police and with First Nations as well, because First Nations are also participating with us in some of those—

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** I just want to ask one last question, because we're not answering the question. We don't know why that change was made. Obviously, that change was made for a reason. Law enforcement tells me it's an ambiguous term. That should be of concern to both of you, should be a concern to the taxpayer, should be a concern to this government. It's an ambiguous term. Law enforcement has problems enforcing the law because of a definition change, and we can't answer why the definition was changed.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

We now go to the government. MPP Cuzzetto.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** I'd like to thank the minister and the deputy minister for being here.

I noticed that when the Liberals were in power, there was a trend. In 2012, they closed Ontario Place. On April 7, 2014, the former Liberal finance minister said automotive assembly lines were a thing of the past and we were not competitive. How were you able to attract \$17 billion in automotive investment during a pandemic and \$1.74 billion for Ford Oakville, where I worked for many years?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you, MPP Cuzzetto, for the work you do in your riding on behalf of all constituents.

It's an excellent question. Having spent most of my career in the private sector, I know that one of the things that really drives investment in any jurisdiction is a tone and a culture of:

(1) Is it good for capital investment?

(2) What are the cost inputs into those investments?

(3) What is the type of certainty that you have? Business loves certainty.

Ontario has all these ingredients, except that if you don't pursue those, you will run in to challenges. So we've had previous governments where there was a lot of uncertainty. There was a high-cost jurisdiction. We had more regulations in this province—we were the red tape and regulation capital of North America. Our energy costs were going through the roof.

So what we've been able to do since day one is send a message to the world and to people and investors here in Ontario that Ontario is open for business, that we will work with stakeholders to set the conditions for investment, which includes looking at red tape reduction, which includes the input costs into business, which includes an environment of stability and certainty, which business likes.

Now, let's look at the evidence. You referenced the almost \$17 billion plus of investments. I don't even think that counts Volkswagen, so it's going to go up, and there are more and more investments coming in. That's a signal that it's working, that people and businesses really value what Ontario has to offer, which is a good environment to do business that has a labour force that is skilled, an investment in labour, in workers across the province that is taking advantage of the natural resources in this province, including the critical minerals that are going to power the electric vehicle revolution.

By the way, it's not just electric vehicles and advanced manufacturing; it's technology. We now have about 400,000 technology workers in Ontario, which is more than Silicon Valley. We continue to invest and support the technology space, but it doesn't stop there. Life sciences: We just announced a couple of weeks ago in the Waterloo region an additional—I believe it's \$7 million or \$8 million to set up a life sciences arena, and it continues.

These are the types of things that government can do to set the conditions for people to invest in this great province, not just their capital but in the people of Ontario.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Thank you. Another question on the EV vehicles: As you're aware, when we first came to

office, we eliminated the incentive on electric cars. But 70% of the cobalt is coming from the Congo, and approximately 15 pounds of cobalt goes into these vehicles. They use child labour in those countries. There's a Harvard professor now that wrote a book called Cobalt Red, and I recommend everybody read it.

How will this prevent child labour if we use our own natural resources from the Ring of Fire and in northern Ontario?

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** I can't speak to the specifics of other countries, but I can speak to the specifics of Ontario. We're blessed with an incredible set of natural resources. In fact, we have a town called Cobalt. We need to invest and reinforce that we're here to support, whether it's through exploration incentives, whether it's through process, through the Mining Act revisions for permitting and for regulations, whether it's for infrastructure necessary to actually get to the mines—and, as well, electricity etc., to be able to get those critical minerals. If we're going to be really powering this electric vehicle revolution, critical minerals and our access that we have here in Ontario is absolutely essential.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** I'll pass it on.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Two point three minutes. MPP Triantafilopoulos.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** Chair, how long do we have?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Two minutes.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** Thank you, Minister, for being here. I wanted to focus on some of our experiences when we were actually travelling in some of the northern communities as part of our finance committee deliberations. Time and time again, the issues that came up were the issues around health and addiction supports that the communities needed. Tied to that was the homelessness that was also a major concern. I wonder if you could speak specifically to how to support those municipalities with those specific issues.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Thank you, Ms. Triantafilopoulos, and the great work you're doing in your riding. People always look for the magic bullet or the silver bullet. Within our health care system, it's many things. We're providing the funding: over a \$15-billion increase over the next three years in our health care system, which, by the way, will go to help pay for all the health care workers we have.

But it's more than that. It's home and community care. People want to age at home. It's mental health and addiction, as you mentioned, and it's homelessness. Many communities, not least of which are in the north—and I was just in Thunder Bay last week—need a hand up. In fact, the opposition mentioned AMO a few minutes ago.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy:** Well, AMO's number one ask was mental health and addictions support and number two ask was homelessness. Their top two asks, which—they did praise our government significantly on that. We increased the budget for the Homelessness Prevention Program by 40%. We increased the mental health and ad-

diction funding by \$425 million over three years specifically to increase the base rate for community mental health. Go talk to CAMH. Go talk to other organizations that are on the front lines, delivering—because we want to give people a hand up, and that will help our health care system. It's good social policy, it's the right thing to do, and it will help communities right across this great province.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

MPP Fife, do you have a question, a comment?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Just as a follow up, I did review a question from another member of the committee around the estimates for the Attorney General. I did review it, and it's not clear, and I just would like to ask the deputy minister to perhaps follow up with the specific amount of tax dollars that have gone towards court challenges. Just in this last budget would be helpful, because it's not transparent in the actual estimates.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Okay, you've heard the request.

Anything else? Yes?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Based on the exchange that I had with the finance minister on the Ontario Place deal, I would like finance committee to officially invite the Minister of Infrastructure to finance committee so that we can ask her around the transactions that have taken place. She's free to accept it or not.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Is that the wish of the committee? We don't have agreement on that.

We are still on the panel meeting with the minister, and we'd like to say thank you very much for making the presentation this morning and being here this morning.

If there's nothing else officially, do you have anything more to add before we recess?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes. Well, I realize that the government has said no to the invitation, but perhaps the infrastructure minister is very proud of this deal and would want to come to finance committee and talk about how great this idea is. So I still think that we should at least extend the invitation. There's no harm in doing so.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Okay. Thank you very much.

We are now recessed until 3 o'clock.

*The committee recessed from 1002 to 1501.*

CANADIAN MANUFACTURERS  
AND EXPORTERS  
FUTURPRENEUR

ONTARIO DISABILITY COALITION

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome back. We are continuing public hearings on Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed committee documents, including written submissions, via SharePoint.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation, and after we've heard from all three presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from members of the committee. This time for questions will be divided into two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of seven and a half minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of four and a half minutes for the independent members as a group.

With that, we will ask the presenters to come forward. I believe in the first panel we have the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, Futurpreneur and the Ontario Disability Coalition. I believe we have two representatives—Futurpreneur will be virtual, and I believe the Ontario Disability Coalition will also have a virtual attendee.

With that, we will ask all the presenters, as we get to your turn, to introduce yourself—your name and position—for the record in the Hansard to make sure all the comments are attributed to the right person.

With that, we'll start. I just want to add that, in your seven minutes' presentation, at one minute left I will just say quietly—well, hopefully loud enough that you will all hear it: "One minute." Don't stop, because that minute is the one that you can put what we call your punchline in, to make sure that you don't leave the most important part of your presentation out.

So, with that, we will turn it over, and we'll start with the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

**Mr. Dennis Darby:** Good afternoon. I'm Dennis Darby. I'm the president and CEO of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for inviting me to appear today on behalf of CME and to make some brief remarks.

We've been the voice and advocate for manufacturers and exporters in Canada since 1871, and we were established here in Ontario.

As you know, Ontario's manufacturing sector is a key contributor to the economic success of the province and the country. We employ just over 750,000 workers and contribute over \$270 billion annually to the provincial GDP. However, back in 2018, employment in the sector had declined by almost 300,000 from 2004. Over that period, the competitiveness of the sector was negatively impacted by high costs of doing business, gaps in skill programs and lack of business investment. So while overall output of the manufacturing sector has just about returned to its pre-pandemic record levels, our productivity has continued to lag our key competitors, most notably the United States.

Long-term negative trends like that are not easily overcome, and we've been very encouraged by the large projects announced, with the support of both the provincial and federal governments. Our surveys of SMEs, small- and medium-sized manufacturers, show that they are the least prepared or able to adopt the new technologies we need them to employ to compete successfully as we transition to a new, greener economy.

We need all of these companies to be part of the supply chain, so we very much welcome the government's proposal

to introduce the new Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit in the 2023 budget. That new 10% refundable income tax credit for capital investments in buildings, machinery, equipment and technology will help Ontario manufacturers to grow, become more competitive and create more jobs. It will also encourage existing businesses to expand their operation and attract more new investments to the province, preparing them to seize the opportunities offered by the new wave of investment by many of our supply chain leaders, notably Stellantis in Windsor, Honda in Alliston, ArcelorMittal Dofasco in Hamilton and newcomers like Volkswagen in St. Thomas and Umicore in Kingston.

The tax credit will also, in our mind, act as an interesting complement to the existing CME Ontario Made program, which promotes locally made products and helps consumers identify and purchase them. That program has registered almost 7,000 products from 1,600 manufacturers in Ontario since its launch in 2020. By investing in Ontario-made innovation and technology, we can really ensure that there are more products made right here at home, providing more options to consumers and more resilience to our supply chains, and helping grow and develop future exporters, and that's more prosperity for all.

We also believe that the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit is a positive step in securing the manufacturing renaissance we hear about. To accomplish this, we'll need a really comprehensive approach. As we've seen, financial incentives are important for manufacturing investment, and in a globally competitive environment, we must be relentless in maintaining our fair share of investment in jobs versus other jurisdictions.

Financial supports aren't everything. Even more important is government coming to the table with industry and other stakeholders to ensure that the supports remain connected to what industry needs. Earlier today, we had a very serious indication of Ontario's long-term commitment to the sector with the establishment of the Advanced Manufacturing Council, something that we at CME have been asking for for many years. We believe this council will inform a comprehensive strategy for our sector and help secure our gains for the long term. Hopefully, by working together with members of that council and with the government and with our colleagues across all industries, we can help further develop, inform and support programs like the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. We really are confident that the support will help manufacturers in Ontario of all sizes grow and prosper and continue to be that great source of jobs and futures for so many people.

Thank you for your attention. I'd be happy to answer any questions. I know it was brief, but if it's not clear, just ask.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll now go to Futurpreneur. I think this is virtual. This would be your time to speak up.

**Mr. Anukul Sharma:** Perfect. Yes, I've been unmuted. Thank you.

Hello, everyone. My name is Anukul Sharma, and I am the chief financial officer of Futurpreneur Canada. Thank you to the honourable members for having me here today to discuss budget 2023 and the positive impacts it will have for Futurpreneur and the wider start-up ecosystem in Ontario.

Futurpreneur Canada is a national not-for-profit with headquarters in Toronto, and our goal is to help young entrepreneurs age 18 to 39 launch or acquire businesses through our unique combination of collateral-free financing, mentorship and wraparound services and supports. Since our inception in 1996, Futurpreneur has supported and provided over \$107 million in collateral-free loan capital to diverse, young entrepreneurs across Ontario. We have launched over 3,600 new businesses, creating an estimated 18,000 jobs in rural communities and urban centres across the province.

Currently, Futurpreneur has over \$13 million in active loans across Ontario, and moving forward, we expect the province to continue to have the highest shares of new business launches through our program, which isn't a surprise considering Ontario's status as a leader in the Canadian start-up and entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Over the last few years, we have developed tailored programs for entrepreneurs that face additional barriers to success, including the Indigenous Entrepreneur Startup Program and Black Entrepreneur Startup Program, both of which are active in Ontario. Thanks to the government of Ontario's support in the last fiscal year, we were able to support 300 new businesses to launch, providing over \$12 million in loan capital through our programs and co-lending partnerships with BDC. We were also able to hire a new business development manager in North Bay and an additional entrepreneur-in-residence, helping us reach more entrepreneurs across the province, and in northern Ontario specifically. We have also multiplied the government of Ontario's investment more than five times over, through leveraging our loan capital, BDC's co-lend loan capital and operating funding from the federal government and dedicated corporate partners, providing significant return on investment for the province.

#### 1510

Investing in Futurpreneur is a direct investment in inclusive economic development. We are proud to say that the province's investment is generating such strong outcomes. The renewed investment of \$2 million in Futurpreneur in the 2023 budget will enable us to build on this incredible success, with the goal of supporting 320 new businesses to launch this year, with an increased focus on rural entrepreneurs, Black entrepreneurs, Indigenous entrepreneurs, newcomer entrepreneurs and young aspiring business owners looking to acquire an existing business.

Futurpreneur works with well over a dozen different ecosystem partners across Ontario, including small business enterprise centres, community features development corporations, regional innovation centres and a wide range of other strategic partners, ensuring that our collegial and collaborative approach supports the best possible outcomes for young entrepreneurs anywhere they are in the province.

In addition to the renewal of Futurpreneur's funding in budget 2023, our team was grateful and excited to see the renewed investments in the RAISE program, funding for Invest Ottawa to expand into a regional innovation central hub for eastern Ontario and funding for the city of Brampton to attract more entrepreneurs. Taken together, these investments in our partners and complementary programs will help to ensure that Ontario's entrepreneurial ecosystem continues to thrive and grow.

All in all, on behalf of Futurpreneur's staff, board of directors and mentors and the young entrepreneurs we support each and every day, I want to thank Minister Bethlenfalvy, Minister Fedeli and Premier Ford for their ongoing commitment to our programs and for the continued investment in budget 2023 in support of the entire ecosystem. I look forward to taking your questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

The next presenter is the Ontario Disability Coalition.

**Ms. Sherry Caldwell:** Good afternoon. My name is Sherry Caldwell and I stand before you as the co-founder of the Ontario Disability Coalition, a grassroots organization established in 2017 to be the voice of caregivers and people with disabilities. I'm the mother of an 18-year-old daughter who has medical, physical and intellectual disabilities and I'm very honoured to speak on behalf of caregivers in Ontario.

Let me be clear: The disability community has been neglected by the government for far too long. Disability and human rights are disregarded from birth until adulthood, and this needs to change. I'm urging you to take action and address the critical needs of caregivers and people with disabilities in this committee and here at Queen's Park. COVID-19, hyperinflation, lack of home care, lack of rehabilitation therapies for all disabilities, and unaffordable and inaccessible housing, coupled with the high cost of disability, have created the perfect storm that has pushed families caring for people with disabilities to the brink.

Families are facing immense challenges and sacrifices and it's time to recognize and address their struggles with political will and action. I'm going to give you four examples of families. We've heard from hundreds; these are just a few.

A two-parent family of four with only one income, whose child uses a wheelchair, were forced into a shelter during the height of COVID when their landlord evicted them to renovate. With skyrocketing rents here in Toronto, it made it impossible for them to find an accessible and an affordable home on one income. To climb out of this, their only option was GoFundMe. This illustrates how the lack of accessible and affordable housing and single incomes create the risk of homelessness and unnecessary stress and instability in families' lives.

Another mother in northern Ontario sought government financial support to ensure she had an accessible washroom in her home. It was suggested to her in front of her child that she transfer her son to the Ontario Homeshare Program, where all his needs would be met and foster parents would



have full financial support to meet his needs. This was said in front of the teenager, who was traumatized by this idea and promised to have fewer seizures.

Another solo mother who has been reaching out to us lives in Oshawa. She's caring for a child that requires ICU-level care at the home. She's surviving on Ontario Works—less than \$700 a month. To do this, she has to visit the food bank weekly. If you can imagine the emotional, physical and financial strain she's experiencing having to provide 24/7 care during a nursing crisis and also make her way to the food bank.

The current system is failing these families, and it's unacceptable.

Furthermore, a single mother on ODSP advocating for home care for her child, who requires 24/7 care to be discharged from London Children's Hospital, had her child support and services withheld as a form of retaliation. Her child has even been apprehended due to her advocacy efforts. This child should not be removed from her family and forced into a group home due to a lack of home care and services. It's unimaginable, and this highlights how families who advocate for the child's rights face discrimination.

There are too many heartbreaking stories. The system to support families of children with severe and prolonged disabilities is just beyond broken. These mothers were all contributing members of society, with education and careers, prior to having their children. Through no fault of their own, they're left without a safety net and the ability to return to work.

It's time to prioritize the creation of a lifetime caregiver benefit, raise the rates of the Ontario Disability Support Program and reinstate the Ontario children's advocacy office in some form. We cannot continue to neglect the disability community and disregard their basic human rights. It's time to take meaningful steps towards a more inclusive and equitable Ontario. We urge you to recognize this by pressing forward with these issues and truly funding these systems. We need to ensure that children and people with disabilities are supported, protected and empowered to live with dignity and equality.

I'm going to pass it to Nicole.

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** My name is Nicole Payette-Kyryluk, and my daughter Alexa was born with an extremely rare neurodegenerative disorder called intermediate Salla disease. It's like a cross between ALS and MS. She's on a ventilator, has seizures, requires suctioning, tube feedings and requires 24/7 ICU-level care in the home. She's medically fragile and has an intellectual, physical and developmental disability. She's non-verbal, and I am her voice.

I'm here today because approximately 100 of the most medically fragile children in Ontario had their complex special needs funding cut from the Ministry of Community, Child and Social Services as of April 1. This funding is used to pay for private nurses in conjunction with funding from the Ministry of Health. This has created a crisis where families no longer have the funding they need

to pay for nursing supports during a nursing staffing shortage.

I'm presently in a position where I will need to fire some of my daughter's experienced long-term nurses because I no longer have the private government funds to pay them. Attempting to hire new nurses is challenging, because they don't have the required skill set and they don't want to work with such a medically complex child when they have so many other work opportunities.

Alexa's nursing funding comes from five different sources to pay for nurses from four different agencies. It's all taxpayers' money. At the end of the day, nursing funding—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** —should be one-stop money: one coordinator, one administrator, one book-keeper for financial reporting, with the flexibility to hire nurses and the best experienced staff. I think everyone has lost sight that this is about children that need 24/7 ICU-level care who deserve continuity of care and patient-centred care. They should not pay for such a fragmented, broken system.

Alexa doesn't care about any of this. She loves her nurses and would be devastated if she no longer had the care and funding due to funding cuts. It's unethical for front-line workers to work on family members, but you're asking parents of medically fragile children to perform complex medical care and even resuscitate their own children without a nurse present. This is not respite care. It's unethical and traumatic for the entire family, and it needs to stop.

All I want today is to ensure that she is able to access the supports that she needs and she's entitled to. You have the power to right this wrong. I implore you to urgently reinstate her funding and to make it flexible for families to—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** Thank you. I have a lot to say.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you for your time. You got most of it in. Thank you very much, and maybe we can get the rest of it in as we go to the questions.

For the question round, we will start with the opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you to all presenters. I am going to start with the most, I would say, urgent and crisis-level concerns that have been brought to us today.

**1520**

Sherry, thank you for your advocacy, and Nicole, thank you for having the courage to speak up on behalf of your daughter. I have to say, we have raised the issue of the cuts to complex needs funding. I think you used the word "unethical" at one point, and we would agree.

We would also point to the obvious financial implications, whereby if your daughter does not receive care in-home—not having the appropriate nursing care, the appropriate nursing funding—what are the options? Would you see your daughter possibly having to go to a hospital, having to be in an institution? That is way costlier, in our view: both the emotional labour of it, but also the cost of it.

So this change, this cut to the funding, doesn't make any sense to us, from a basic humanitarian or basic compassionate level. We certainly are going to try to get the government to see this through amendments to this budget, which, we have very clearly said to this government, missed the mark. It was a missed moment of opportunity to show some courage in supporting our most vulnerable in the province of Ontario.

I know, Nicole, you kind of ran out of time a little bit. But it is helpful for us to hear, it's helpful for the Conservatives to hear and for the independent members to hear: What will be the impact if you cannot employ enough nurses, with government support, to take care of your medically fragile daughter? What are the implications of that for you as a mother, for your daughter? But also, please contemplate the financial implications, if you would.

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** I mean, it's devastating. I don't think people can appreciate—I've been doing this for 11 years. I'm burnt-out. It's very traumatic. There's the emotional, psychological and financial part. A lot of the funding that we get through the government is very limited; ADP hasn't been updated since 1996, so even supplies cost a lot of money.

The nursing part right now is the Wild West with the nursing agencies. Because of privatization, the rates that they're providing us are through the roof. The Minister of Health has proposed family-managed home care, but the rates are so low that it doesn't actually cover the private agency rate. So all of the options that we have to get funding for nursing—it doesn't work. We would have to put her in hospital, but the hospital won't accept her, because they're not going to take up a bed because of nursing shortages.

The facilities that you're talking about—there are a few places—won't take her because of the complexity of her needs, and we don't want that. Alexa needs to be home.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Exactly.

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** And then that falls back onto parents to do ICU-level care. I've resuscitated my daughter myself, without a nurse present. I'm not a medical professional. It's not okay, and that's what we're living through right now. It's a lot for us to handle.

Thank you. I hope I answered your question.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** We completely agree with you that it is not okay. It is not okay.

In fact, there have been, based on the family and children's services association stats across Ontario, more and more parents having to give up their children into care, and those care agencies, because they are underfunded by the government, have had to—because you don't want to put those children into private care, as you point out, because the private care actually costs a lot of money and they're not interested in taking high-needs children, right? F&CS in Waterloo region has actually opened up two homes at their own cost for medically fragile children. So it is a state of desperation across the province of Ontario.

I just want to let you know that we're hearing what you're saying. We're feeling the emotion that you're sharing

with us. Thank you for having the courage to come before the committee today. I really do appreciate it, Nicole.

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** Thank you.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Sherry, the story that you told us around recommending a child go into foster care through the Homeshare Program and having the child, obviously, experience that trauma: Can you just expand on that story a little bit more, because it tells a broader story of where the funding is going and where the funding is not going?

**Ms. Sherry Caldwell:** Well, the Homeshare Program is like a foster care system for children with complex needs, where they provide respite care, they provide income funding, they provide accessible housing. Those are all things that biological parents need to care for a child with very complex care. Families right now, especially young families—there are some families that are just maybe going off maternity leave, and they have a child on oxygen and need all this care and funds. These children cannot go into the day care system—they're too fragile—and these parents cannot afford not to return to work because they have very high rents to pay. They have a very high mortgage. They have to put food on the table. Disability is extremely expensive, and young families just do not know how they are going to survive.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Would you say it's accurate that people don't know how dire—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** —the state of affairs is until you actually experience a family member or friend who has a medically fragile child?

**Ms. Sherry Caldwell:** Yes. I think disability is kind of behind closed doors. When people see my daughter in her wheelchair, they just assume that the government is giving her therapy or the equipment. But 25% of the cost of all the equipment is on families, and it's many, many pieces of equipment. The more severely disabled your child is, you'll need things for the bath or the toilet. Those things aren't even funded. Vans to be adapted—it's over \$40,000 to make your van adapted for a wheelchair. These are extremely high costs, and to access any sort of funding from the government, you have to be very low-income. I think there is a program where you can get \$15,000 towards your van being adapted, but your income has to be below \$30,000. What family with an income below \$30,000 can even afford a van?

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** So you have to live in poverty intentionally—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

I'll go to the independent. MPP Brady.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Thank you to those presenting this afternoon. My question is for Sherry and Nicole. I hear from many folks who are disabled, and they're having a tough time making ends meet. We know there is a wide range of disabilities, but these folks are in a situation due to no fault of their own.

I'm going to kind of switch gears from what my colleague was asking. Years ago, when I worked for an MPP, we wrote a white paper on ODSP. One of the things many

folks on ODSP told us was that they may not be able to work 40 hours a week, but they can maybe work 10 or 15 hours a week. The way that the system is set up now, it disincentivizes them to actually go out to work, because the government largely takes all those monies away from them. So while we push for amendments in the budget, I'm wondering if you guys might be able to comment on the cases where ODSP recipients can find joy in contributing to a workplace, whereby the government should be encouraging them to go and work and allow them to keep those monies so that they can escape the cycle of poverty.

**Ms. Sherry Caldwell:** Yes, I think the government should stop clawbacks. They did change it recently, so that now ODSP recipients can earn \$1,000 a month before they claw it back. However, that is a very small percentage of people with disabilities. Most people on ODSP are suffering. We had a rally this morning outside. They cannot afford to eat. They can't afford housing. It's cruel and it shouldn't be happening in Ontario.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Okay, and the government—

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I'll take the time, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Oh, MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you all for being here and sharing your story, and Nicole, you especially, with your daughter. I'm sure she needs your care all the time, so you finding a way to be here today was really valuable. Thank you.

Sherry, maybe I'll ask you this question. Do you know how many individuals or families will be affected by these devastating cuts to the complex needs funding?

**Ms. Sherry Caldwell:** I think Nicole said there are 100 families. I think she can answer that.

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** Is that okay? Can you hear me?

**Ms. Sherry Caldwell:** Yes.

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** Perfect. Basically, the families in the province that get funding are about a hundred, but there are a lot of families that are on wait-lists or don't even have access to funding right now. So who's in the queue, right? Because right now, they stopped giving the funding. We were grandfathered in—it's been about four or five years—but new families are not getting funding now.

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So how many more need funding, but it's not eligible for them? We don't have the numbers, to be honest, and I don't think the government is tracking them either. But it would be a lot of families that get enhanced respite funding, and they're linked to SickKids, CHEO and the London Children's Hospital, because they go there quite frequently.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** All right, thank you. I know you talked about the many different sources of funding, which, again, you and other families are trying to cobble together—

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** Piecemeal.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Yes, exactly—to be able to provide the care that your family member, in your case your daughter, needs. Could you just talk a little bit about, in

general or in your case, the percentage of the funding that you are now trying to scramble to find, or to find alternatives for care, because of this funding being cut?

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** Just to give you some numbers: They had increased the funding that we received for the last two years under complex special needs funding. They said it was for the pandemic. But with us, nothing stopped. The care needs have changed, and because of privatization of the health care system, I have home and community care hours that I'm not using. I have money from the Ministry of Health I cannot touch or use because I don't have nurses to use that funding with. So we've had to go more private, but now that I have more private nurses who have been with us now for a number of years, I don't have the funds to pay them if the government doesn't shift the funds from one ministry to the other. I've asked for transfer payments from one ministry to the other, but they told me it's illegal, that they can't do that.

Every solution that I've come up with outside of the box, they have said no to, so I don't know what to do. I am here, I'm desperate, because something has to change. And that's why I'm here today: I'm hoping that you can help me.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That does conclude the time for the independents.

Now we go to the government. MPP Crawford.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to all the presenters. We appreciate you being here, virtually and in person today, and giving your commentary on the budget. We certainly take everything into account.

I would like to start my questions to the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, if I could. You did touch on a little bit the manufacturing renaissance under way in Ontario today. As you know, in this budget, we brought about a manufacturing tax credit of 10%. Could you talk to the benefits of that particular tax credit and how it will affect industry and economic and job growth in this province? Because, as we all know, we need a strong economy in order to pay for the social services that we so badly need, so if you could give some commentary on that.

**Mr. Dennis Darby:** Yes, thank you, certainly. In fact, that tax credit, when you look at it, is principally aimed at small- and medium-sized businesses, and that's really where we need the improvement in competitiveness. We've been falling behind our peers for many years. These are the companies that are supplying the big companies. They're part of the supply chain, or they may be part of a regional supply chain, so in that case that tax credit on investment is intended to spur the upgrading.

It's not that our workers don't work hard or aren't smart, but we have not been refilling the capital stock for the last 20 years. We need to improve the capital stock, the equipment and technology. The idea here is that for Canadian companies that are either part of a supply chain, want to be part of the new green supply chain or want to be a part, to take advantage of the "friendshoring" that the US talks about, well, one of the things that we can do collectively is by providing those tax credits on the investment to de-risk some of that and hopefully attract more investment here in Canada.

So that's the essence. It's mostly for small- and medium-sized companies. We all see the big announcements for the gigantic, global companies, but every one of those companies has hundreds, if not thousands, of suppliers.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Yes, so this will help small and mid-size players. But in terms of the overall growth in manufacturing capacity here in Ontario, do you think that what's been happening over the last couple of years is by accident, or is it by an environment that the government has provided to the province in order for businesses to flourish?

**Mr. Dennis Darby:** Definitely at the provincial level, but also at the federal level, the changes that have gone into place to either reduce red tape, to improve the ability to site and invest in business—things like changes in the WSIB rates a few years ago—all these things try to make it easier. Companies make their decisions in real time: “Where do I invest my next amount of capital? Is it here or in the US?” I can tell you, when the IRA came out from the US, the Inflation Reduction Act, there was a huge sucking sound out of the US. Even suppliers and customers were saying, “Why don't you invest down here?”

So two things have happened. We have been improving. We've been improving our situation. We're almost back to pre-COVID levels in terms of output. The second part is that it's really timely, given the fact that we are in an unprecedented—to use that word that's been used so much—competitive situation with the US.

If we want to be part of that and continue to grow manufacturing, the things that governments are doing, that this government has done and others have done to make it more attractive to invest, to keep the jobs here and to grow—I think this is yet another really good step.

We look forward to, ultimately, how we do even more, because frankly, the US is going in hard in terms of trying to attract manufacturing jobs back. They've told us many times they weren't thinking about us; they were thinking about China when they were trying to attract. But I think that the government has done a good job of reminding industry and reminding the public that it's really important for us to compete, and we're doing a good job.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Do you see any issue if we continue this trajectory of growth? Do you see with your companies and your industry any shortage of labour? Is that an issue that you are facing?

**Mr. Dennis Darby:** We just polled our members in the fall—we were asking something else; we do a normal quarterly poll—and they came back and said, “Actually, what's really keeping us up at night is the shortage of skilled trades and general labour.” Both of those things are leading to delays in investment or turning down orders, so the labour shortage continues.

Some of the new moves done federally—obviously, at the request of the provinces—to get more economic immigrants in is really important, and getting more young people, especially women and girls, into skilled trades. All of these are steps, but they're going to take a while to fill the pipeline. Even with the slowing of the overall economy, we still are seeing somewhere in the range of, across Canada—

I haven't got the Ontario number—about 75,000 vacancies in the manufacturing sector. That will continue to be an issue, but again, investing in more productive technologies will actually help bridge that gap.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay. Thank you.

How much time left, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One point four.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** I'll pass it to my colleague MPP Saunderson.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Go ahead.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you very much to all our presenters here today. My question is for Mr. Sharma, from Futurpreneur. I know in my riding we have a very diverse economy, but we've seen through the COVID pandemic a lot of start-up companies. A lot of our younger population are striking out on their own. It's great to see in our economy, but it's a trying time for them.

I know the town of Collingwood started its own business accelerator trying to help the start-ups. So I'm wondering if you can just talk to me a bit about what measures—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Pardon me? We're up?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** One more minute.

Could you just talk to me about what activities you take to market yourself and what other companies you work with, or other stakeholders or programs you work with, including such programs as the Starter Company Plus Grant and Summer Company?

**Mr. Anukul Sharma:** Thank you for the question. I'll try to be brief: I think, first and foremost, the best part about our program is the collateral-free financing and the mentorship. I think that mentorship has been really critical through this period, during the pandemic, as a lot of our young entrepreneurs haven't faced these economic headwinds in the past, such as high inflation and supply chain issues. I think getting that right support, along with the financing, has really helped them, essentially, survive the pandemic.

Secondly, in terms of who we work with, we're the only national not-for-profit organization that—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question. We'll have to finish in the next round.

MPP Begum.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much for being here today, to all three of the organizations. Before I begin, I just wanted to ask if it's possible for us to get a written submission for the presentations. We would love to have a written submission for our research team, and I know that you put in a lot of effort to write those as well.

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I will start from the bottom with the Ontario Disability Coalition and go to Sherry and Nicole. One of the things that you spoke about was the clawback at the end and a little bit in terms of what's going on with our health care system. I would love to just hear your thoughts on the whole system itself when we talk about disability funding,

whether it's OW, whether it's ODSP, the lack of incentive we have for people to even get out of this little hole when they're receiving any disability funding, because the clawback is enormous, and for a family—you mentioned the 30,000—it's very, very difficult. I would love to hear, Sherry and then maybe Nicole, your thoughts on that.

**Ms. Sherry Caldwell:** For caregivers, there is no funding; you're just supposed to survive. So even a mother on Ontario Works with a child that's 24/7—she cannot go to work because she has to be there. My daughter is in grade 12; she goes to Richmond Hill High. But the bus picks her up at 9:07 in the morning and brings her home at 2:30. There's lots of frequent hospital visits or therapies and things too.

Actually, I would love to work. I had a career that I love. But to work and raise a child that has medical and physical disabilities or even developmental is very, very challenging. It's not that these parents don't want to work, but we have another job. Caring for our children is a job. A lot of the way the government works, there's so much paperwork involved in accessing any sorts of funding or supports that we have, and we have to take care of that as well. Coordinating the nurses, the care—it really is a full-time job that's not recognized.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Thank you so much, Sherry.

Nicole, I want to ask a follow-up question, and then I want to go to you. You mentioned what happens when you have to take your daughter to the hospital and the lack of beds. One of the biggest crises we're facing in our province right now is the health care crisis and lack of staffing. We've seen, I think, that this budget really fails to address the staffing crisis across the board, especially with Bill 124 and how we're taking a lot of these health care workers who we call heroes to court. Unfortunately, it really discourages health care workers to continue in their professions. Without that support, you don't have the support that you need for your family members.

The other bit of it is, if we talk about being fiscally responsible, it pays the province—it's actually worth it to be able to say, "Let's have the funding available for those with disability. Let's have the funding for our health care system." Because in the long run, it will cost the province much more money. When you have someone like your daughter ending up in a hospital bed, per night that costs way more than having a PSW or having the service provider or having a therapist or having someone come and do the work that they need to do to help them go through their day.

Nicole, I know that you deal with this on a day-to-day basis. I would love to hear your thoughts on that.

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** Basically, in hospital, Alexa would go to the ICU or intermediate care because of how fragile she is. She's actually palliative. I didn't really mention that earlier, but she is palliative. So it's a lot of care. I can't even begin to describe the care.

The issue we're having right now is that with the privatization of home care, a lot of the publicly funded nurses have moved on because their salaries haven't increased at all. I even had the CEO of one of my agencies come here

to talk to me so I can understand things better. She said to me, "We're getting government funding," because they're a publicly funded agency, a not-for-profit. They do get funding from the government absolutely, but it's earmarked for specific things, and none of it has been earmarked for the salary of these home care nurses. So I've lost a whole bunch of my daughter's nurses, or they've had to cut back their hours. They're now working in hospitals, in long-term care, so we're actually losing staff. Basically, home care is—there are so few nurses. We also need nurses, not PSWs; actually ICU-level-trained nurses. A lot of them don't have the skill set to even clear an airway. I'm doing that for them. I don't have a choice, because the nurses don't have the right skill set to take care of her. That's how barebones we are, because those nurses are working in hospital right now because they can make more money or working for private clinics or for private agencies.

Until we start investing money and start paying these nurses a decent wage, there's a \$15-an-hour difference between my private nurses and my publicly funded nurses. How can you expect them to keep working when their colleagues within my home are being paid such a difference? It's shameful; I'm sorry. We'll never solve this until we start taking care of the people that take care of us, and if we don't take care of them, we're not going to have anyone left, you know? There's nothing to keep them here.

I hope that I answered your question.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** You've said it beautifully. If we don't take care of—

**Ms. Nicole Payette-Kyryluk:** It's dire straits.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** I can understand your frustration. I think one of the worst legacies we have from the Mike Harris Sr. government in the late 1990s was privatization of our home care system, which completely destroyed anything for palliative care, anything for home care. Look at the inconsistencies we're facing when it comes to home care, as well. Thank you so much, Nicole, for that, and thank you to Sherry.

I want to move on to the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters for my next few minutes, as well—and I hope I can get your written submissions, Nicole and Sherry.

You mentioned the labour force—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** You mentioned the need for us to have a strong labour force, and one of the things I've advocated for is for our government to work with the federal government to make sure that we have a good system that recruits workers who are highly trained, who come to contribute to this province.

Any suggestions that you have for the government to make sure that we are able to do that in the best way possible, and then allow them to use their training in our province in the best way possible?

**Mr. Dennis Darby:** Thank you. I'll try to be quick. First, yes, the Provincial Nominee Program is really one of those tools the government can use to really identify the workers they need. We do need government and industry to work together, maybe through this council, to try to identify which are the skills that we need. And yes, we

need them to be able to practise. I think there are ways to help streamline the ability of people, if they've got an equivalent to a Red Seal trade, to come in and hit the ground running, because they're bringing their families, they're coming to Canada—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. Not quite quick enough.

To the independent: MPP Brady.

**Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady:** My question is kind of more of a statement, I guess, following up on the Ontario nominee program. Mr. Darby, I agree that the pandemic taught us that we should have things made in Ontario, made close to home. I'm not sure I agree in picking winners and losers, as we've seen with some things, because my farmers tell me they'd love to see some of the commitments in agriculture that are being made with other things, as well. But I digress.

I noticed that your news release following the budget spoke about the Ontario nominee program. And yes, there is a doubling of immigrant levels under the program, which is welcome news, but I know that the program's problem has long been that it takes far too long to process applications. Depending on the stream—and that's under the old numbers—it can take anywhere from two to four-plus months to process applications, which I feel is far too slow. I guess my question is more of a statement that perhaps some pressure needs to be put on the government to ensure that those increases in applications are processed in a more timely manner.

**Mr. Dennis Darby:** I agree, at both levels—both the provincial and the federal level, to make sure we do get people in. So, yes, I very much agree.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** My question is also for Mr. Darby. Thank you for being here. I know that, given your experience, you will know that business confidence is one of the keys for companies to make investments. While the tax credit can be an incentive, the companies only get the benefit of that if they actually make the investments.

With the Ontario Chamber of Commerce saying that business confidence is the lowest it's been since they've been tracking it in 2017, what's your take on how many companies will be investing and be able to take advantage of this tax credit program?

**Mr. Dennis Darby:** Good question. First of all, what we've seen in our sector, the manufacturing sector and manufacturing exporting sector, is actually quite a high level of confidence. When we polled our members, they are going to continue to grow, they're going to continue to invest, but the timing has been quite speculative right now. Very few are looking at going to another jurisdiction, because manufacturing is one of those industries that is very affordable. If it doesn't make sense to make it here, you can make it somewhere else. I think what we've seen is that there is a high level of desire to continue to stay in Canada. Over 80% of the companies said no, they had no intentions of leaving, and they wanted to invest here.

For the investment tax credit, it's true: We do need companies to invest, and it is very much targeted at Canadian corporations. So these benefits are not for the international

or multinational; they're for Canadian corporations who want to invest to be part of the supply chain here. So I think it is going in the right direction.

**1550**

But despite what my colleagues at the Ontario chamber have said, we have seen a high level of confidence in the manufacturing sector, and part of the reason for that is that the US economy continues to be red-hot, and 75% of everything we make in Ontario goes to the US. That's why it might defy the typical logic: because we are so much an exporter, like we are in food processing, like we are in automotive, like we are in transportation. That tends to make them a little bit more bullish about what the future could hold.

But we still need to invest, because we want to get that next investment for the next generation of projects.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you very much.

A quick question for Mr. Sharma: I just wanted to go back—I was trying to keep track of the numbers you were throwing out at the beginning there. Could you just go back and repeat the number of loans in Ontario that you provide, the percentage of your total portfolio? And also, you've got \$11 million in revenues, contributions and sponsorships. I wanted to just get a sense of how much of that was provincial and how much is federal.

**Mr. Anukul Sharma:** To answer the first part of your question, we have supported and helped launch over 3,600 new businesses in Ontario. As a percentage of our portfolio overall, I would say Ontario is roughly 30%. If we were to look at the active portfolio, it would be around 30%.

I'm sorry; what was the last part of your question?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** That concludes the time.

We'll now go to the government side. MPP Saunderson.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I'm going to continue with Mr. Sharma. I would ask you to finish your last answer, but I've forgotten what was asked, so I'm going to give you a new question.

In this budget, we're looking at giving \$2 million in additional dollars to Futurpreneur in Canada. I'm wondering if you can just tell us how that will augment your programs moving forward.

**Mr. Anukul Sharma:** Absolutely. It will help us to continue providing our support and services in the post-pandemic—well, in the pandemic and the post-pandemic era. Essentially, our goal is to help launch, to help support young entrepreneurs to be prepared to launch their businesses and to help 320 young entrepreneurs launch their businesses in this fiscal year. It will include the financial support, the mentoring support and the support that we'll be providing after their business is launched. So our goal is to not only help them launch, but also to help them be successful post-launch as well.

An example of that is that whenever businesses fall on tough times, they reach out to us and we essentially provide them services to help restructure their loan, as needed. We help them reduce their financing costs until they can get back to a place where they can continue repaying their loan.

Obviously one of the key focuses for this year will be that there are a lot of businesses that are going to exchange hands and people who will be either retiring or looking to sell their business. That will be one of the key areas that we'll be focusing on, to make sure that these business acquisitions, when people are ready to take on the businesses—that these businesses don't close down so the economy continues to have those small businesses.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you for that. My final question: I know you do a fair bit of work with racialized and Indigenous entrepreneurs, as well as women and youth. I'm wondering if you can tell us about some of your successes with those communities.

**Mr. Anukul Sharma:** Absolutely, yes. I'm really proud to share that, sir. In our loan portfolio, over 44% of our entrepreneurs that we have supported are women entrepreneurs.

We also, since the launch of our Black Entrepreneur Startup Program—which was funded by RBC, and we do co-lend along with BDC on this part of our portfolio—we have helped over 300 Black entrepreneurs launch their businesses.

We also have been able to, in the last year, launch a program called Ohpikiwin, which is supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs with their journey to launch their own business.

So we have had really good successes, and it's part of our values to make sure that our economic impact that we are creating is also supporting diverse entrepreneurs.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Sharma.

Those are my questions, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Byers.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you very much, and thank you to the presenters again this afternoon. I maybe just wanted to continue on with Futurpreneur for a moment. I'm intrigued by you describing your business or your organization to us as you have. Can you give us a sense of what type of businesses or industry, if you will, your organization is starting with the young folks and give us a sense of what they're getting into?

**Mr. Anukul Sharma:** That's a really good question. We see a wide variety of businesses. If I were to look at the last couple of years, we have helped launch anywhere between 800 and 1,000 businesses a year, and we see all kinds of sectors.

A really important thing that attracts young entrepreneurs to our financing, mentoring and other services is that it's collateral-free. A lot of times, young entrepreneurs don't have the credit built to go to banks and get the loans. We hear time and time again from our entrepreneurs that if it wasn't for Futurpreneur, they wouldn't have received the funding.

We see a lot of businesses in various sectors. We have had some really big successes in Ontario. A business that comes to mind is Knix, which had an over-\$1-billion valuation. The founder and the CEO of the business, Joanna Griffiths, had a full circle and right now sits on our board of directors, as well, thankfully giving back to the entrepreneurs. She often says that if it wasn't for Futurpreneur

giving her that initial tranche of funding, she wouldn't have been able to get her business off the ground.

So I think a key part of that is that with the support of Ontario government funding, federal funding and other corporate partners, we have been able to really leverage that to support young entrepreneurs and build a program that essentially not only helps them get launched, but helps them succeed post-launch as well. I would say we have seen a really wide variety. Even throughout the pandemic, we didn't see a shift in the types of businesses. There was a really good mix of resilient business launching.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Great. Thank you very much. Who knows; maybe your members will become part of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters as they move on.

To you, Dennis, just one follow-up question: With the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, can you give a sense of the sectors? Are there particular areas you are hearing that will take more advantage of it than others? I'm just curious which sectors you feel may be most active in this program.

**Mr. Dennis Darby:** Thank you for the question. Very much in the transportation supply chain and in food processing: Those are both areas where there are an awful lot of small and medium-sized businesses that have to recapitalize, and those are two very important parts of our economy here in Ontario. I expect, from our early days, those will be the two that you think about a lot when you think of Ontario.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** My colleague asked about it earlier, and you commented about the labour. I've heard over and over the challenges that are organizations are finding in finding labour. Are you seeing any gradual improvement in that over time?

**Mr. Dennis Darby:** Yes.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** I'm curious about your observations currently—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Since you've heard it over and over, you won't hear it this time. Your time is up.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** My apologies.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** That concludes the time for this panel, and we want to thank everyone for presenting and being here to help us today. We again say thank you for all the time you spent in preparing it.

## RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION COUNCIL OF ONTARIO

### WINDMILL MICROLENDING

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Our next panel is the Residential Construction Council of Ontario and Windmill Microlending. Both presenters, I understand, will be virtual.

**1600**

With that, as we start, we want to make sure to remind the presenters that they will have seven minutes to make their presentation, and at the end of the seven minutes—if your presentation goes up to six minutes, I will say, "One minute," and when that one minute is up, I will say, "Thank

you.” Then we will have 39 minutes of questions from the panel.

With that, the first presenter will be the Residential Construction Council of Ontario, or Rescon.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** Great.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** And welcome back.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** Always a pleasure. Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Your arm looks better.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** It does. I was able to get my brace off, so thank you for that.

My name is Andrew Pariser. I’m the vice-president of Rescon. I’ll turn it over to my colleague Amina to start our presentation.

**Ms. Amina Dibe:** I’m the manager of government and stakeholder relations at Rescon. Thank you to the Chair, Vice-Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for providing us the time to give our feedback to Bill 85, An Act to implement Budget measures and to amend various statutes.

Rescon represents over 200 builders of high-rise, mid-rise and low-rise housing in the province. We work in cooperation with government and related stakeholders to offer realistic solutions to a variety of challenges affecting residential construction, many of which have wider societal impacts. We are committed to providing leadership and fostering innovation in the industry through the following six core focuses: health and safety; training and apprenticeship; government relations; labour relations; building science and innovation; regulatory reform; and technical standards.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** Bill 85, an act to implement budget measures, is a foundational piece of legislation that builds the infrastructure Ontario needs to succeed in the future. Through the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, the Skills Development Fund and related programs and investments in mental health and addiction, this bill is taking meaningful steps to address the labour supply issues impacting the residential construction sector. In addition, greater resources towards the OLT and the Landlord and Tenant Board to clear backlogs will also help address key housing issues. As a result, Rescon strongly supports Bill 85.

I’d like to offer—and Amina will offer—some comments on several key pieces of the bill, including the OINP, skills development and training, mental health and the housing issues, as discussed.

First, the OINP and immigration: Ontario reached a historic agreement with the federal government that doubles the number of economic immigrants it is allowed to select, from 9,000 to more than 18,000 by 2025. Labour supply can be trained domestically or filled through immigration programs like the OINP. Rescon is supportive of this program, as well as the push to bring in skilled trade workers with the specialized skill sets required to build the houses and condos and rental apartment units Ontario needs. We need immigrants with skills in basement forming, high-

rise forming, concrete and drain, and the finishing trades like hardwood-floor installation and railing installation. We need to prioritize these workers. However, with the additional allocation comes the need for additional resources, and that’s why we were so pleased to see the additional \$25 million invested in the OINP through budget 2023.

On the skills development side, in addition to skilled trade immigration, the government continues to invest in programs and associations that train and promote the skilled trades in Ontario. Examples of these investments include but are not limited to the STF and organizations like Skills Ontario. For anyone who is listening, Skills Ontario is having a skills competition from May 1 to May 3 at the Toronto Congress Centre, and this will include a young women’s conference; a First Nations, Métis and Inuit conference; and countless skilled trade promotion events and networking opportunities for youth, employers, parents and other influencers.

**Mental health:** This bill continues to champion mental health and mental health initiatives. To put it simply, mental health is health, and an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. When it comes to mental health issues, construction workers—and I can say this as a man—especially men, are still too reluctant to ask for help. At Rescon, we’ve been working to change the culture of construction and remove the stigma so that all construction workers feel comfortable to ask for the help they need and receive the resources and treatment that is available. We’re supportive of this budget because it invests not only in eliminating the stigma, but also increases access to these life-saving supports.

With that, I’ll turn it over to Amina.

**Ms. Amina Dibe:** On the housing-supply front, we all know that boosting our housing supply is critical to the economic well-being of Ontario, and Rescon is encouraged to see that, in spite of the strong economic headwinds we are facing, the government is intent on meeting the 1.5 million new homes target. Backlogs and delays within the system, including at the Ontario Land Tribunal, only act as additional barriers to getting more housing built. That is why we are supportive of the measures and investments announced in the budget to clear the backlog at the OLT.

A recent report commissioned by our infrastructure partners, the RCCAO, shows that the federal government recuperates 39% of new home construction taxes while only investing 7% in public infrastructure. That’s why we also echo the push by the province to get the federal government to provide HST relief to spur infrastructure and housing.

On the topic of infrastructure, Rescon is also glad to see that the government is moving ahead with its blueprint to build more highways and more public transit, including the Ontario Line and the Scarborough subway extension. Such infrastructure is necessary to accommodate housing and building complete and connected communities.

To summarize, Rescon is supportive of the budget, as it puts in place additional levers and investments into programs and structures that will help ease labour shortages, support



construction workers' mental health, streamline processes to get more housing built and build the necessary infrastructure to support growth.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Is that the end of the presentation? Thank you very much. We will then go on to the Windmill Microlending.

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Oumar Dicko, and I'm the national director of stakeholder relations for Windmill Microlending. I would first like to start my remarks by certainly thanking the Chair, the members of this committee and the staff for inviting us today to speak in support of this important legislation. For our remarks, I'm going to confine our comments to the measures in support of integration of newcomers included as part of the budget in Bill 85.

Each year, Ontario welcomes over 100,000 immigrants and refugees. Many of them are highly educated, very skilled and with valuable experience in regulated professions and trades, but too often, as we all know, their credentials and experience are not recognized. Without access to credit, they're unable to afford the cost of reaccreditation. This leads to long-term underemployment. We've all met Uber drivers who are highly qualified. It also leads to poverty among newcomers, and Ontario loses valuable talents in professions where they're critically needed. There is an abundance of evidence documenting labour shortages in the province and a wealth of data that shows that immigrant talent is going to waste.

Funded in 2005, our organization, Windmill Microlending, provides an innovative solution to this costly problem. Our charity provides affordable microloans and support to skilled immigrants to restart their careers in Canada—those who lack access to affordable credit. Since 2014, when we actually started operating in the province, we've supported over 3,000 newcomers and immigrants in Ontario. As a result of our services, our clients are able to triple their income. We've also provided them with financial literacy training, mentorship and affordable client-centred loans. The success of our clients is great: We have a repayment rate of above 97%, and unemployment among our clients drops from 42% to 7%. And over 50% of our clients intend to work in the health care sector, which is important for the province.

As we're all aware, employers in Ontario face acute labour shortages and skills shortages that threaten competitiveness, economic growth and prosperity. Our ability to employ internationally trained immigrants at a level commensurate to their skills and experience will help alleviate this issue, particularly post-pandemic. That is why we're supportive of Bill 85, particularly the investment announced to enhance the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program, with over \$25 million over three years to attract more skilled workers to the province; also, the expansion of the Ontario bridge training program to help internationally trained immigrants find employment in their field and get faster access to training and reaccreditation in the province. Lastly, we're also supportive of the additional investment in the skills development program to provide

opportunities that are more flexible for Ontario workers and skilled newcomers who are looking to acquire the skills they need to work in the province.

These investments would not only help Ontario attract the best talent but would also support them to acquire the skills and qualifications they need to successfully integrate into the Ontario workforce and help alleviate the labour shortages that we have in critical sectors of our economy.

**1610**

While the work of immigrant organizations like ours is critical to facilitate the professional integration of newcomers, there remain significant barriers, and these investments, including in the budget bill, are a positive forward step in addressing the issue of unemployment of newcomers in Ontario and Ontario's labour shortages.

The reality is that talent is in short supply globally, and with declining birth rates globally, competition for international talent is just going to continue to increase. Jurisdictions like Ontario that facilitate an equitable, efficient and affordable process for integrating international trained individuals will prosper and flourish, while others will lose out.

We appreciate all the work this government is doing, the work that you and your colleagues are doing in the Legislature to address the labour shortages and facilitate the integration of newcomers to create a more equitable and prosperous Ontario for all. Thank you for inviting us today.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the presenters.

We will now start the first round of questioning, and we'll start with the independent member. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for being here.

Maybe I will start with Oumar. Oumar, I'm a bit familiar with your organization. I know you do great work, and thank you for that work to support people who are needing some education assistance. Could you talk a little bit about the conversations you're having with people about the kind of post-secondary support they need, whether it's from your organization or from grants, OSAP etc. to help them get the skills they need again to reach that kind of income level you were talking about?

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** Yes, absolutely. Specifically for clients who are newcomers to Canada, when they get in Canada, they tend to not have a credit history, so access to affordable credit is really hard for them. Therefore, when they are in the process of reaccreditation and licensing, which can be very, very costly across Canada and in Ontario, it's hard for them to find financing to do so. Therefore, they get stuck in survival jobs, which is a vicious cycle for them.

What we hear from our client is really access to affordable financing, which is something that our organization provides, but also, what they want to see is the removal of some of those barriers to reaccreditation and licensing: for example, some of the language requirements that are put in there, the cost of accreditation, and also access to

training, mentorship and different support services that can support them in reintegrating into their professions in Canada.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you. And the changes to programs that affect youth, in particular, for example, youth connection and the supports that some of the Employment Ontario services can provide: Do those have impacts on you? Do you connect with those people who might also be trying to tap into those kinds of services?

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** We do not specifically connect, so I can't really speak to these issues. But what I know is that the majority of our clients are looking for barriers to be removed to reintegrate into the workforce. Ontario, so far, has done a great job by implementing bills that are supporting the removal of those barriers, and the investments that we're seeing in these budgets are also going to support that to attract the best talent in Ontario and specifically help them integrate into the workforce in the province.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Great. Thank you.

I'll turn to Rescon now. Thank you again for being here. Can you talk a little bit more about the kind of government funding supports that are needed to build the number of residential housing units that we need here in Ontario to support the growth in population in our province?

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** Do you want to start, Amina?

**Ms. Amina Dibe:** Sure. Bill 97 was tabled a couple of weeks ago and that was, I believe, the third housing supply-related bill in the last couple of years. Those types of legislation do help remove barriers and streamline processes, but certainly we're looking forward to more legislation and policy. Especially with rising interest rates and, again, the immigration targets, the demand for housing is just going to increase, so we're looking for more ways to work with the government and municipalities so that we can remove more barriers and streamline the process overall from start to finish.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Great. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Twenty seconds.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you, Chair. That's fine.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. We'll go to MPP Rae.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you to all the presenters for your presentations today. I appreciate you joining us.

My question is for Rescon. I appreciate all the work. I know you've worked closely with Minister Clark's office and Minister Rasheed on various legislation pieces over the years.

I was just wondering—you alluded to it in your presentations a little, but could you talk about—I know you are very well aware that our government has an ambitious goal of 1.5 million homes. Short of the Premier telling me and Minister Clark and Associate Minister Nina to get out there and build those homes, can you tell us how the relationship is between labour and skilled trade in our housing supply and how those things are so intertwined? People in the general public may not be so aware of that.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** Maybe I can start with this one. To build a house or condo—let's say you're building a subdivision or a high-rise, and let's say you have 100 people

on site. About five to 10 of those are directly employed by the builder, and the rest, 90 to 95, are employed through the subtrades or specialized skill sets. That's basement forming, high-rise forming, tile, hardwood, railing, plumbing, electrical—all the trades that go into building it. In the residential sector, with a focus on the GTA, about 85% to 90% of all of those individuals are unionized, and so that's the direct correlation there. I mean, we just renewed collective agreements last spring. There were several strikes, and obviously that's not something that we're hoping to repeat in 2025, but I guess it's part of the process. But between now and 2025, those agreements have been settled and they will continue on.

I guess I'll turn it back to you if there are more specifics, but that's essentially how we get people into residential construction, and those are the people that are building the houses and the condos and the apartment buildings, especially in the GTHA.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Great. Thank you. And just sort of building on that, could you elaborate how the additional money for the Skills Development Fund and also the announcement by Minister McNaughton rolled into the budget as well, around the capital, under the new capital stream—could you elaborate a bit on how that would assist, obviously, Rescon and other builders across Ontario in helping us meet our goals?

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** Yes, so one of the focuses when we had 9,000 was obviously within the skilled trades, and it was obviously what we call the specialized skill sets that go into building houses and condos. With an expansion from 9,000 to 18,000, literally you're just adding more of the people we need.

I think most people don't understand that, where there are massive delays when it comes to getting immigrants through the federal stream, the Ontario stream is very efficient. I think it's around three months or less, but compared to the federal system, Ontario's ability to select the immigrants we need but then also process them and get them into Ontario—I mean, it's not even close. And I'm not trying to be critical of the federal government, it's just that the numbers are what the numbers are. So (1) through the OINP, we're getting the immigrants with the specialized skill sets we need; (2) they're getting here a lot faster; and then (3) obviously, with the \$25 million, they're going to get the supports they need.

We've started meeting with more and more immigrants, and one thing that we started to do is we have asked people who are coming to Ontario and Canada, "Why did you pick here?" And not everybody but a lot of people are saying, "Well, it's because Ontario picked me," right? Immigrants will often pick multiple jurisdictions, and whoever responds back is often the place where they'll go. That certainly was it when we were talking to immigrants that came over in the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s. So to get the best and the most competitive and the immigrants to fill the demands we have, processing them and getting them acceptance and getting back to them as quickly as possible seems to be the recipe for success, because otherwise another jurisdiction will pick them and get the best ones.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Thank you.

How much time do we have left, Chair, on our side?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You have 3.1.

**Mr. Matthew Rae:** Okay. I will turn it to my colleague David Smith, if he has a question.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Smith.

**Mr. David Smith:** My question is to Oumar from Windmill. Could you tell this committee, Oumar, about your microloans? Could you explain a little bit what that is?

1620

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** Yes, absolutely. What we do as an organization is we provide affordable microloans, low-interest loans of up to \$15,000, to skilled immigrants and refugees who are looking to obtain financing to pay for the cost of reaccreditation and licensing in Canada.

So, for example, if you have an internationally trained physician moving to Ontario who is looking to become a physician once again in Canada, they have to go through specific training and exams and all of that, and it's very costly. And then most of the newcomers in Canada do not have credit history, so they can't go to the bank and obtain credit through that. So what we do is we address that gap and provide them with affordable financing for them to do so. In addition to doing that, we also provide them with financial literacy training, mentorship and career coaching support to help them better navigate the labour market in Ontario.

**Mr. David Smith:** Great job, sir. In our budget of 2023, our government has pledged over \$25 million per year for next three years in addition to help develop the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program. What do you think of that program and how effective it is?

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** Absolutely, we were very supportive of that and the fact that Ontario was able to negotiate this historic agreement with the federal government to double the number of immigrants recruited under the Ontario nomination program. The fact that the province of Ontario would also invest to streamline that process and ensure that we can process these immigrants relatively quickly in the system—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** —is very, very important.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Go ahead. One minute.

**Mr. David Smith:** Go ahead. Are you finished?

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** It's very, very important for Ontario to be able to do that. As I mentioned in my remarks, the pool of talent globally is short and there will be a race for talent. Jurisdictions that are able to efficiently and quickly recruit talent from around the world and have the environment within their jurisdiction to get them to work as quickly as possible will win, and Ontario is on the right path.

**Mr. David Smith:** Can you speak to that investment and how it helps Ontario's immigration system?

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** Yes, absolutely. So the investment into the nomination program will certainly help—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** You can speak to it, but not for very long. That concludes the time. Thank you very much for that.

We'll now go to the official opposition. MPP Begum.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Thank you to both of you, from Rescon and Windmill Microlending. First, I'll start with Oumar, because you mentioned a few of the things that I've been working on myself in the official opposition, especially with recognition of credentials for a lot of immigrants. It's been, I would call it, my baby when I first got elected and something that I feel very passionate about.

I just want to say thank you so much for the work that you do helping those who go through that process. It's very difficult. A lot of people from across the world come to Canada, come to Ontario, with hopes and dreams of making a future here, making their life, getting employment, providing for their family. The federal government recognizes their skills, gives them points for those skills, attracts these highly skilled workers from across the world, gives them hope, and once they come to Ontario, once they begin life here and start looking for work, they're told that their credential is not recognized; they're told that the eight, 10, 12 years of skills that they have don't matter. You have to go through a retraining process, you have to go through a re-education process and not only that, you have to pay a lot of money to be able to get those credentials.

So the burden is enormous and extremely difficult. We know a lot of people who are highly trained doctors and engineers, who sometimes end up driving a cab. I have a lot of those that I talk to sometimes. I'm sure you help those as well, who are trying to just make do. Do you think that we need to do more to support those? Especially when we talk about the financial burden, the mental health support that they need, as well as making sure that we have a really good bridging program that allows them to go through this process that is not filled with—whether it's paperwork, whether it's the enormous amount of steps—as well as really appreciating the skills and education that they bring in. How do we appreciate those and have a good process to say, “You know what? We understand that you have this education. Let's have an assessment that actually shows what we need for you to practise in Ontario, but you don't have to go through the entire education process, per se”? What are your thoughts on that?

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** Yes, absolutely. You are completely right. I think there's a lot more we could do. What we think as an organization is that there needs to be a concerted effort. There are too many people at the table trying to solve the same issues, but sometimes I feel there's a disconnect between the different parties. I think the role that the government could play is to bring everybody to the table: the regulatory bodies, the employers, the organizations serving immigrants and the government to discuss what are some of the solutions that we can implement to better support newcomers when they come to Canada.

We hear stories from immigrants who are literally packing up and going back to their countries because of the disillusion of coming to Canada and not being able to practise and work in their field, and the fact that it's very difficult to get reaccredited and it's costly. So I think the government could play a role to bring everybody to the table so we can discuss the solutions.

But I think the investments that the government has been doing—the federal government, as well, and the government of Ontario—with the different programs that they've been financing, including funding organizations like ours to support newcomers, is also a step in the right direction.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Just to follow up on that, when we look at just the number of—if this budget is only supporting, let's say, 50 doctors when we're facing a health care crisis, that's not early enough. We have hundreds of thousands of skilled immigrants in different sectors, including our health care sector, who can really contribute to this province and really address the health care crisis. We should be doing much more than 50 doctors, especially with the millions of dollars that this budget is investing in—but not really going to the direct programs. I think with the support that our community organizations and services that organizations like yours provide, we have to really focus on how we address the actual issue instead of having a top-down approach.

How much time do I have, Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Two point three.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** The time goes really fast, so I want to take my next questions to Rescon and ask Andrew and Amina my question about a few things. You mentioned mental health, as well, especially for workers. This budget only has about a 5% increase when mental health organizations, especially some of the provincial-level organizations, called for an 8% increase; 5% doesn't even meet the status quo, but that's what the government is claiming. This 5% will only do just the bare minimum to keep up with the level that we have right now, when we know the dire need.

When we talk about construction workers, for example, when we talk about just what's happened across the board with COVID, would you say that we need to do a lot more than 5%, especially to meet the needs of the mental health support that's needed for workers?

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** So I think there's 5% in this bill, but when you look at what this government has done—correct me if I'm wrong, Amina—there have been dozens of bills that have had dozens of investments, so this is one part of the puzzle. But this isn't the only thing that this government has done when it comes to mental health. This is one of many investments in the announcement.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** Well, they have really missed the boat, don't you think? In terms of some of the organizations, we know that, even for CAMH, they're not able to meet their need within the city; forget the province—especially when we look at a lot of our northern ridings. Some of my colleagues, especially—I sit next to Sol Mamakwa. He talks about his riding—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Doly Begum:** We have youth suicide happening, and we haven't even touched the surface of mental health needs in those areas. They don't have any services. They can't get therapists; they can't get social workers; they can't get any community organizations. Not only is it remote,

but they don't even have the basic first-hand access to get someone to talk to—just the bare minimum.

**1630**

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** We've done four mental health conferences over the four years. We're the first construction association to do a mental health conference. This problem will not be solved with one bill. I think we've seen steady increases in investments over those four years. But obviously there's still more work to be done. We're encouraged by the work that has been done and the investments that have been made, so it's going in the right direction. But COVID was terrible for people mental's health, and—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We will now go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** I'm going to come back to Rescon. I wanted to talk a little bit about affordable housing. I live in Toronto; my riding is Don Valley West. In Don Valley West, I certainly see a lot of million-dollar condos going up. There is lots housing being built, and some of it is concerning to the residents, because there is a lack of community supports going along with that housing, so no schools, no new hospitals, no new community centres etc.

But what I really want to talk about is that I understand developers need to make a profit—they're in this; it's a business. I really want to talk about the people who we know—we still want to have a diverse city. We want people who live in Toronto who are making lower wages because they are in sectors that pay lower wages, whether it's PSWs or other things. We want them to be able to afford homes in Toronto.

What will it take? What does the government need to do to encourage homes that are built that are affordable for people based on their income, not just on market rates, which we know are very high right now, the average home in Toronto being over \$1 million?

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** I think there are many solutions. Maybe I'll try to limit it to just a couple. But the province owns land, the city owns land, the feds own land. If you take the land cost out of it, and there's land dedicated for affordable rental or market rental or whichever level you're trying to hit at, that can be done.

Builders are called builders because they like to build. They like to build market housing. They like to build not-for-profit housing. They like to build rental builds and what needs to be built and what makes sense from a business point of view to build. If the city or the province or the feds want to build more housing, then we need proper investments in it.

There was a report that just came out of a group that we're part of called the RCCAO, and it looks at the different costs of housing. The big things that go into housing are obviously materials and supply, land, labour and government fees. Government fees—and correct me where I go wrong here, Amina—are about 33%. On a million-dollar condo, that's about \$330,000. The feds get

about \$120,000 of that. Right now, they're only putting in about \$8,000 back into infrastructure. The HST is at 13%, so that's \$130,000 on a million-dollar condo in HST.

I'm not trying to blame other levels of government, but the numbers don't lie. All of a sudden, if you look at the amount of money—and I'm not even talking about development charges at this point. But if you look at the amount of money that is being taken by the government, and a lot of it is going to the feds, there's room to make housing a lot more affordable. But I'll pause there.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Just to bring it back, I guess what I'm saying is I don't believe there's enough money in this budget for that kind of affordable housing, whether it's the government contribution to that—again, I think I'm hearing you say that, yes, builders are in this to make a living, and if government wants housing to be built that is affordable by lower-income families, then they need to ante up that money to make that happen.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** Yes. Representing builders, I would love to see more building done too. We are very pro-supply. We are appreciative of this bill.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** There have been historic investments made. But I represent builders. I believe everybody should have a house or a condo or shelter. So for me, you could never invest as much as you should in housing, it doesn't matter your political stripe.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll go to the government. MPP Triantafilopoulos.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** Thank you to all the speakers who have joined us today. I found your responses extremely informative. I'm particularly interested in hearing from Andrew and Amina, when you were talking about housing and Bill 23 in particular.

Can you describe to us what, in fact, the landscape was like for previous years in terms of the lack of housing, both affordable and other residential housing, that didn't exist in our province, and, in fact, the fact that we have to now move very rapidly over the next 10 years to be able to build the million and a half homes?

We all know that Ontario, and particularly the GTHA, is rapidly growing. Immigration is coming into Canada at a very large number, and I believe last year alone—the Premier has said—400,000-plus new immigrants came into our province. So I wonder if you could speak specifically to the need for housing.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** Maybe, Amina, if you want to start, because I know you've done a lot of good work on these bills, too.

**Ms. Amina Dibe:** Sure. I think, in general, the last three or four housing bills, in addition to measures announced in this budget and previous budgets, are all important steps to, again, breaking down barriers so that the environment to build is there, and so a lot of housing gets approved at the municipal levels and there are other approval agencies that are involved in every step of the process of getting a construction project approved.

Recent provincial bills have helped in streamlining the process. I know in the most recent Bill 97, there is a proposal to join planning documents: A Place to Grow and the provincial policy statement. Again, removing these barriers, creating a bit more cohesion within the overall process, is super helpful. I know there have been investments towards digitization of the approvals process; we'd love to see more of that at all levels of government. These steps are super-important, and we're looking forward to more changes to help make the building environment a bit more predictable and stable.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** We've also heard about the different kinds of housing that exist today: the different kinds in terms of size, in terms of being able to deal with different needs. I know I've been hearing about these tiny homes. I wonder if you could just expand a little bit about that, in terms of the variety of housing that would be available, both that would be affordable as well as able to meet different needs.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** I think that's an excellent question, because depending on where you are in the province, the demands and the needs are different. I grew up in Ingersoll, and obviously it may not make sense to have an 80-storey tower there, because there are no subways. Ingersoll is in Oxford county—and so a shout-out to the Chair of this committee, Ernie Hardeman. He's the local MPP there, and he's done a great job. It's always good to be in a room with somebody else from Oxford county.

But you're right: We need different types of housing. We need more housing, but we need housing that makes sense, right? And so when you have the intersection of two subway lines, let's put some density there and let's get rid of the NIMBYism in that area. When you get into Ingersoll or other parts of the province, you probably don't need 80 storeys, but you still need some kind of vibrant downtown where people have somewhere to call their own and have a roof over their head.

But 100%, there's room for every type of housing in Ontario. It's a big province.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** We've also been hearing, of course, about the fact that we've got a labour shortage and a skilled labour shortage. The government, as you know, has invested heavily in that area. I wonder if you could also speak to that in terms of specifically the construction and housing.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** I might be biased, but I think this government is a skilled-trades government. The commitment is tremendous.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** We like that: "skilled-trades government." Thank you.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** I think, to young people, to their parents, to educators, we look at the skilled trades differently now, based on the good work—whether it's Monte McNaughton, Jill Dunlop, Stephen Lecce or Premier Ford, it's hard to find a cabinet minister or an MPP in this province who doesn't understand the importance of skilled trades, and that support means everything and is really putting us on a path to address the labour supply concerns

that we have. We're just very appreciative. This is a skilled-trades government, and we really appreciate that.

**Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos:** Thank you.

I'd like to pass on my time now to MPP Smith, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Smith.

**Mr. David Smith:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. How much time do we have here?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Two point two.

**Mr. David Smith:** First of all, I want to thank Oumar. Because we were speaking and I got cut off, I want to get back to you, to let you know: First of all, I'm with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. I'm the parliamentary assistant to that ministry, and I know there are a lot of great things that are happening there.

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Oumar, for the Ontario bridge training program, if the budget is passed, funding of \$3 million will be available for the next fiscal year. How do you think this funding will positively impact the newcomer community and provide a better pathway for immigration and gainful employment?

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** Yes, absolutely. I think the expansion of the Ontario bridge training program with the new additional investments will help internationally trained newcomers to find employment in the province, and they will get access faster to training towards licensing and accreditation in Ontario. I think this program is important for newcomers in the province, and we're very appreciative of the fact that the government is investing to expand the program a bit more.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. David Smith:** Do you believe that we are on the right track in terms of aiding these programs? There's obviously a shortage in the labour force in Ontario, and we're trying to meet the fit and needs of employers to make certain that the right skills are on track to continue our productivity and not reduce production.

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** Yes, absolutely. It's a step in the right direction. The Ontario bridge training program is one program. There was also in this budget additional investment in the Skills Development Fund to do that as well. So certainly the government is on the right track here.

**Mr. David Smith:** Is that the people you're finding in your structure or your organization to help with that?

**Mr. Oumar Dicko:** Yes. We support a lot of immigrants who are also taking part or participating through the Ontario bridge training program, and also—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that presentation.

We now go to the opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you to the presenters. I appreciated the conversation today.

I want to start with Rescon. I've been an MPP now for almost a decade, and Rescon has been fairly strong in the past on ensuring that health and safety regulations and health and safety and the welfare of workers are actually at the forefront. I just wanted to get a sense from you—the

government has sort of moved in a direction where they're very lax around enforcing credentials in skilled trades. I have to confess to you that this is very personal to me because I'm the mother of an electrician. When you have certified tradespeople working alongside uncertified skilled trade workers, for me, that makes the workplace unsafe.

You will note that for three years running, the Ontario government has not enforced its rules requiring tradespeople such as electricians, auto mechanics and plumbers to be certified. This is sort of a fallout of the mess from the College of Trades and disorganization. But I do know that Rescon has presented to the government in the past on ensuring that if you are going to have workplaces be safe, then you have to have certified, educated, experienced workers on those sites. The enforcement of Ontario's compulsory certification of licensed trades ground to a halt right after this government took office.

I see that you're very pro-government. There's a lot to be said about some of the things that you have said, but I feel like we should be able to find common ground on workplace health and safety. I'm sure I don't need to tell you both that Ontario has had quite a deadly year for workers, particularly in the construction trades.

There's no sense in pointing fingers. It could be enforcement; it could be education; it could be affiliation. I just want to give you a chance, please, to speak to the importance of enforcing the fact that we need to make sure that every worker who is working in construction or on any project anywhere in the province of Ontario—that those workers should come home safely. I'm going to give you an opportunity to speak to the importance of that issue.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** Yes. I'm the chair of the Rescon health and safety committee, and we sit on several IHSA committees. You're right: For the last couple of years in this province, we've had over 20 construction workers die annually. That's way too many, and more work needs to be done there. That's why we have a Rescon health and safety program, and that's why we engage. What I find, when it comes to health and safety, is that you're 100% correct: It's got to be all parties. There's a role for employers, there's a role for labour and there's a role for government.

April at the WSIB has the "day to remember," and maybe the best charity that I've ever heard of is called Threads of Life. We never want to have a worker die, but when they do, Threads of Life gets in touch with the workers' families and they offer support to the families who lost a loved one, who lost a mom, a dad, a brother, a sister. Everybody should know about Threads of Life and everybody should know about the Day of Mourning, because they're both very important.

When it comes to certifications, we do follow this very closely. There were at least three rounds of what we'll call BOSTA legislation. What we were very adamant on is that we have specialties in this province, and we have specialized inspectors. So health and safety, we think, is so important that nobody else except for health and safety inspectors should be doing it. That being said, though,

electricians—there's the Electrical Safety Authority. That has specialized inspectors, and we very much appreciate and support the role of ESA. I don't want to get into the weeds too much, but health and safety is number one. Keep it with health and safety, with the Ministry of Labour inspectors, because they're the ones who have the expertise. There is a role for groups like TSSA or the ESA to do specialized inspections in those areas—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** But Andrew—I'm sorry to interrupt you. It's such an important issue for me. We need to make sure that the enforcement is there. We want to make sure that every workplace is safe, and it won't be safe if there isn't accountability. The way that we keep people safe is that we make sure that they are trained, that they are supported as workers.

I do appreciate Rescon's position on mental health. The government of the day has said, "You know what? We're going to give 5% to mental health." The sector asked for 8%. I'm raising this issue within the context of the skilled trades because we have new research—that Rescon actually has been part of—around addiction, around mental health in the workplace, and opioid addiction on construction sites is at a dangerous level, as are suicide rates.

I think, at the end of the day, if we're focused on safety, we need a multi-focused lens to make sure that the enforcement is happening, that the training is supported by the ministry. But when people have enough courage to come forward and ask for help when they're on a construction site, that help should be there for them. So while we disagree on some things, I think that we can agree on this.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** And anyone in residential construction, through their union—what we have is—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** There's trust funds, and through those we have mental health resources, and there's resources through the benefit—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I think the pathways just have to be really clear, and I think that should be non-partisan.

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** I agree 100%.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I do want to say that AMO and Ontario's Big City Mayors have both pointed out, with regard to Bill 23, that there's 1.25 million homes in the approval pipeline that have not been built. I want to give you a chance to say—some of these approvals are 15, 16, 30 years long. If we want to get housing built in the province of Ontario, what can we do to address this pipeline?

**Mr. Andrew Pariser:** When we've looked at some of those numbers, the approvals are what we'll call at the first stages. For instance, in a municipality, you can't start a construction project with just one approval. You have to—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That does conclude the time.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks, Andrew.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** That also now concludes not only the time for that question but for this panel. We want to thank the panel. Since they were all virtual, we thank you virtually. Thank you very much for

taking the time to prepare and be here to help us with these deliberations. We very much appreciate it.

1650

UA LOCAL 787

IUOE LOCAL 793

**Mr. Ernie Hardeman:** Our next panel is UA Local 787 and IUOE Local 793. I believe they're both here in person, so if they'll take to the table. You will have seven minutes to make your presentation—

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** If I could have the attention of the committee, or the lack thereof—

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Order.

I would advise the panellists that you have seven minutes to make your presentation. We ask that you give your name and position at the start of the presentation so Hansard can make sure we have the right name. At six minutes, I will say, "One minute." That doesn't mean to stop; it means the punchline should come in the next minute.

With that, we will turn the floor over to the presenter, and the first one is UA Local 787.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** Good evening. Thanks for having me. I'm Andrew Tarr. I'm business manager of UA Local 787, HVACR Workers of Ontario, and also am president of the Ontario Pipe Trades Council. Today, I'd like to speak to the proposed \$224 million for the Skills Development Fund to leverage private sector enterprise and expand training centres, including union training halls, to provide more flexible training opportunities for workers.

First, I'd like to give you a little bit of a background on the information of the Ontario Pipe Trades. The Ontario Pipe Trades is comprised of 10 UA locals, local unions representing HVACR workers, sprinkler fitters, welders, plumbers, steamfitters, gasfitters and oil fitters. Combined, these unions represent some 30,000 workers, of which some 8,000 are apprentices. The UA, or United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada, has been in existence in Canada since 1890 and has played a big part in building Canada.

UA unions, to someone that really is not familiar with them—you would think that the whole purpose is to represent workers in their labour relations. There's something else that UA unions have been doing, and that is training. Looking back in history, for almost as long as the UA has existed in Canada, we have been providing training to our members. Through the collective bargaining processes, all the locals have established joint training committees that include both union and employer representatives.

Today, the Ontario Pipe Trades operates 15 training centres throughout Ontario, offering trade-related training in health and safety, journeyperson upgrading, welding, gas fitting, code compliance, worker-ready, electronics and electrical troubleshooting—just a few of the hundred-

plus courses offered today. Some of these training centres are also training delivery agents for refrigeration and air conditioning system mechanic, steamfitter, sprinkler fitter, plumber and welder apprenticeships. They are also recognized under TSSA as training delivery agents for gas technician programs 1, 2 and 3 and pipefitter/oil burner technician programs 1, 2 and 3, and many of the training centres are also authorized to be welding and brazing test centres.

Overall, the unions affiliated with the Ontario Pipe Trades provide approximately 900,000 hours of training. We spend \$21 million to do the training, with a complement of 20 full-time instructors and 216 part-time instructors. The funding for all the training the UA provides in large part is a result of members agreeing that a portion of their wages fund the operation of the training centres, and the remaining portion of the funding comes from industry partners and employers. Those training centres with TDA status also have access to Apprenticeship Capital Grants through the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

The results from the UA commitment to training see that over 90% of our apprentices who write the C of Q, or certificate-of-qualification exam, pass on their first try, and 95% of all apprentices who are signed up with the UA locals complete their apprenticeships. If you do a comparison to an industry average in Ontario, apprenticeship completion is only about 50%, so I think the UA locals have a pretty good handle on training apprentices.

The high success rate is not only due to the quality of training that is provided by the union training centres, but we also owe a lot of the success to the resources that union members have when they attend our training centres. These resources are tutoring, mentoring and mental supports. Our members are an investment in our future. The better we prepare them, the more successful the unions and the signatory contractors are.

I've given you a brief overview of the training system and will now discuss some of the challenges that unions and the union training centres face. The union training centres, for the most part, are member-funded. They operate as not-for-profit entities and, through an agreement, are housed in buildings that are owned by a trust within the union. This arrangement, under normal circumstances, has worked well. As memberships grew, a small portion of dues would go to training and over time allow expansion of the building or buying larger buildings.

Today, we're facing challenges that are now putting pressures on our traditional training systems. Inflation is putting upgrades, expansions and new buildings out of reach, and rapid changes in technologies are forcing training centres to constantly upgrade. Together with member growth and more space required to accommodate new technologies, the traditional model of slowly expanding no longer works. To keep up, unions are having to invest large amounts of money that exceed simple dues deductions or training fund commitments.

In the 2021 budget, the government committed to providing funding through the Skills Development Fund

that supported Minister of Labour Monte McNaughton's Working for Workers agenda. Through this stream of funding, the Ontario Pipe Trades received much-needed funding, some \$11.6 million—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:**—which allowed the 10 local unions to upgrade technologies so they could expand online training. This expansion of online training assisted with us meeting our COVID restrictions and also made training more available to the members who live beyond commuting distance to our training centres. We were also able to purchase new equipment that would provide our membership with work-ready skills, familiarize them with new pipe-assembly technologies and troubleshooting skills that would make them more efficient and more employable.

All in all, the Skills Development Fund was a success for the Ontario Pipe Trades. The Ontario government really stepped up and should be applauded for its direct support for the UA pipe trades training requirements. However, the one thing that the first and second round of SDF funding did not address is space. Many of the union training centres—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes the time. I'm sure that we can get the answer to the rest of your presentation in the questions going around.

We will now go to the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793. The floor is yours.

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** Thank you very much. My name is Melissa Atkins-Mahaney. I'm labour relations manager and general counsel for the International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 793. I'm here today on behalf of Local 793 and our sister training organization, the Operating Engineers Training Institute of Ontario, which I'll refer to as OETIO going forward.

I first want to thank you for the invitation to appear today to speak to this very important issue. Local 793 fully supports the government of Ontario's 2023 budget Building a Strong Ontario in Bill 85. We believe this government is correctly focused on building and growing the Ontario economy for the future, and they've done so by demonstrating a forward-thinking approach on how to future-proof Ontario's economy from economic downturn. This government is taking lessons learned from the pandemic and implementing them into this longer-term plan.

Local 793 represents over 18,000 members across the province of Ontario and the territory of Nunavut in the construction, industrial and mining sectors. Members of Local 793 predominantly operate mobile cranes and heavy equipment. OETIO, our training arm, has been dedicated to providing quality training to meet industry needs for many years now. They've been in operation since 1982 and are a training delivery agent for the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development approved to deliver mobile crane, tower crane, concrete pump and heavy equipment apprenticeship programs in addition to a number of other intensive training programs. Earth moving is offered at our Morrisburg campus, while our mobile and tower crane training is primarily offered through our



Oakville campus. Local 793 and OETIO are in a bit of a unique position amongst the building trades because we represent both compulsory and voluntary trades.

**1700**

We believe there are three key pillars that this budget offers that are important for our trade and our members. First and foremost, the Ontario government is continuing to prioritize training skilled workers and committing to provide continued funding through the Skills Development Fund, including a new \$224-million investment stream, which will be crucial to expand brick-and-mortar training centres, including union training halls.

Secondly, this government has committed to building a strong critical minerals sector through the province by investing and supporting the ability to unlock Ontario's northern region by building critical infrastructure that will support the Ring of Fire development.

Thirdly, the Ontario government continues to have an ambitious capital infrastructure plan to build highways, transit and infrastructure projects with an unprecedented amount of investment coming in the next 10 years.

For the operating engineers, we are ready to build new training centres now. We've seen this problem coming for some years, and we're ready to address it. The challenge that we have is that our Oakville and Morrisburg campuses are currently running at 100% capacity year round. The only way to train more apprentices and pre-apprentices and provide adequate skills upgrading training is to create more capacity by opening additional training centres throughout the province.

We know at the provincial level that the demand for crane and heavy equipment operators is projected to see significant upward momentum. There's a chart that I provided in the submission that shows those numbers. I won't get into that, but suffice it to say that over the outlook period, we're looking at needing an 8% increase from where we sit today. In numbers, that correlates to 3,250 new entrants to meet the need for skilled crane operators and heavy equipment operators in the 2023 to 2027 period.

At the same time, where this need is increasing, Local 793 retirements are projected to rise 13% in the next five years. Approximately 21% of our active members are aged 55 and over and will be eligible to retire in the next 10 years.

OETIO has worked diligently to increase capacity for training at both of our campuses. We've increased capacity by almost 80% in the last five years despite significant hurdles created by the pandemic.

So what have we been doing? Over the last year and a half, Local 793 has dedicated to purchasing a number of properties around the province so we can build the training centres that we need to train our members. We've purchased two acres in Stoney Creek, three acres in Sudbury, 20 and a half acres in Oro-Medonte, six acres in Sarnia, and we're currently in the process of purchasing another 20-acre property in Thunder Bay. These properties have been purchased with 100% Local 793 member equity. But

in order for us to be able to accelerate our training expansion plans and address these skill shortages, investment in these training centres is vital, and we think that that's going to come through this significant investment committed by the government.

At the same time that we need to increase capacity, Local 793 realizes that we need to do a better job with recruitment as well. This means recruiting and training young people but prioritizing our fastest-growing population of youth, which is Indigenous youth. Compared to other trades, we've done a very good job at recruiting, training and retaining these members, but we need to do more. We know that one of the greatest challenges in recruiting members and continuing with skills upgrading training is the fact that we only have two campuses right now, and both are located in the south. We need to create capacity in the north, closer to where these members live, where their families are etc. This holds true not just for Indigenous workers but for women who we want to recruit into the field as well, because there are different, unique, oftentimes family realities that exist that we need to address. We think we can do that by building training centres closer to where we're going to be recruiting people.

The Ring of Fire will provide long-term and prosperous job opportunities for Ontarians—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** —particularly Indigenous living in First Nations communities in the north. So Local 793 and OETIO support the government of Ontario's Bill 71, the Building More Mines Act, which seeks to amend the Mining Act.

With our experience representing over 1,000 production workers at the Mary River mine in Nunavut, we've seen first-hand as we've participated in the regulatory process up there the intense challenges that exist, and quite frankly, it detracts from foreign investment wanting to come to Canada and invest their money in mines. We believe that what the government is proposing is going to streamline that process, while at the same time addressing key environmental concerns and Indigenous land claim concerns as well.

The bottom line is that we're ready to tackle these challenges. We're ready to break ground quickly, and we look forward to working with this government.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much for the presentation.

We'll start the questioning, the first round, with the government. MPP Crawford.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to both presenters. Nice to see you here today to discuss the budget. My question will go to the International Union of Operating Engineers. First, thank you for being here. I've been to your Oakville facility. It's a great facility. You do great work, and I think the safety standards that you instill in the crane operators are phenomenal. If I'm not mistaken, we have one of the best safety records in Canada and, indeed, the world.

My question is focused on—you touched on how you want to expand. Would you be building these facilities?

You've got the two facilities right now. You're really going to decentralize it, then, the training, because it sounds like you've got different properties throughout the province.

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** It's not so much decentralizing; it's that right now we've hit capacity, so we can't offer any more. Right now, as you can imagine, if it's earth-moving training, if it's crane training, it requires land space to do this. We have a much larger property in Morrisburg, which is why the earth-moving training is focused there, with crane training at the smaller property in Oakville.

We look at it as supplementing those training programs that we currently have. For those who are able to attend, whether it's Morrisburg or Oakville, obviously we're going to continue to use those facilities to train as well, but we need to increase capacity. The larger properties that we've purchased: We believe that those will serve very well as earth-moving training sites, and tower crane, mobile crane. With some of the smaller properties in Stoney Creek, where that's very close to Oakville, for example, we're probably going to be offering skills-upgrading training: zero-to-eight-tonne training, lots of health and safety courses, that sort of thing, where it's more conducive to that scale of building that we're able to build on there.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** So is it fair to say, then, that the International Union of Operating Engineers is optimistic and excited about the future of Ontario in terms of what's happening, in terms of infrastructure development, mining opportunities, wealth creation, prosperity going forward?

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** Absolutely. I think this is a really exciting time in Ontario. There are challenges, of course, but we think that this government is proposing a lot of great things to manage those challenges. This government's commitment to investing in the skilled trades right now—we know that one in four jobs in Ontario is going to come from the construction industry. It's important that we continue to provide training, that we continue to provide enforcement, that we continue to do all the things we need to do to keep quality people in the trades and promote this as a valid career path going forward.

It hasn't always been that way, right? Historically it has sort of been a path of second choice for a lot of people, and we want it to be a career path of first choice for people, and a very prosperous one at that. We believe that through the quality wages that we have, which are some of the highest in the industry—I think we've got the best pension plan, I'd argue, in the industry, and the best benefit plan in the industry—we're going to do that.

Commitments like mental health and addictions, I know, are all concerns for everyone, but how we get there is through our benefit plan. Through the COVID pandemic, we know people have struggled with mental health, our members included, so business manager Gallagher made a recommendation to the jointly trustee board that we increase provision of mental health benefits to all of our members. I don't think any other trade offers what we offer right now, which is up to \$5,000 per member and all of their family members for mental health services on a

yearly basis—that's private, not through OHIP. We recognize there are challenges, but we're addressing them, and I think the skilled trades are well positioned to do that.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** We know there's a skilled trades shortage; I think we all agree and acknowledge that. How do you see that playing out with your profession, with the crane operators etc.? It's a high-paying career. Is there high demand for that occupation? Are you still finding a shortage of workers?

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** Like any trade, we want to attract the right people to the trade: people who are committed to making a career of this and are not just going to sort of be in and out. We have some of the highest standards in the industry. Our training program is rigorous. If you're a crane operator, it's a compulsory trade, so in addition to all the hours, there's an in-school component. It requires a level of dedication to stick it out as a crane operator—or a heavy-equipment operator, for that matter.

But absolutely, we're focused very heavily on recruitment, on recruiting the right people, on recruiting young people and making sure that people know that this is a valid career path. The vast majority of our members are making over \$100,000 a year. Some are making upwards of \$300,000 a year. This is a great career path with an amazing retirement path for many people, and we're confident that we are recruiting and we're going to continue to recruit quality people to the trade.

1710

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you. I'll share my time with MPP Cuzzetto.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Cuzzetto.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Thank you, Chair, and I want to thank both of you for being here. My father was a pipefitter and a welder. My father-in-law was a crane operator, and my son is becoming a mining engineer. Right now, he's at Queens, but he will be going up to Timmins this summer and working there.

This budget bill that we have in front of you: How will that solve the shortage of workers in this field?

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** Is it okay—

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Both of you can answer, one each.

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** It doesn't impact so much the recruitment piece of it. Like, we have to do that, and we are doing a very good job doing that. But certainly what it does is it helps us get people trained faster.

Right now, we have a number of members—and this is partly due to pandemic restrictions—who are waiting to come to our institute to get trained so they can go and write their C of Qs, so that they can get their licence. That shouldn't be happening. We should be able to funnel people—once you've hit your apprenticeship hours, you've done your in-school component and you've done all the pieces you need to do, you should be able to finish that off and go through.

Right now, that has been a really big challenge for us. We're at more than 100% capacity at Morrisburg. We're now even housing people at local—well, there's only one local motel in Morrisburg, but we're trying to push people through as quickly as possible. We know we have to train

more people on a yearly basis than we're doing now, so this money is going to be critical to helping us do that.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** I think it does help. The crane operators and the UA locals have growing problems, and we are running into the inability to provide enough training in a timely manner, which is creating a lot of frustration. It's also interfering with—if we cannot put apprentices through the system in a timely manner, we can't bring new apprentices in, so it is slowing down the process. Allowing unions brick-and-mortar contributions, grants, or however it comes, is a big help to getting us to meet the demand.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** I just have another question for both of you. Do you think every member in this House should support this bill?

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** Yes.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** Yes.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll now go to the official opposition, MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thanks so much for both being here. I want to start with you, Andrew. Today, the government announced the province is eliminating tuition fees for the Basic Constable Training Program at the Ontario Police College and expanding enrolment in a bid to get more police officers into communities. Now, the government has not released the cost of this initiative. I think you were here in the audience when I was telling you that my son went through the apprenticeship program as an electrician. It was very costly. It was hard to find an apprenticeship. There were extraneous, ancillary costs around safety equipment.

Can you just speak to how important it would be for the government of Ontario, if they truly are committed to ensuring that we have enough skilled trades in Ontario—what would the impact be if the government supported apprentices through waiving their tuition?

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** I'm in the union, so the tuition that our apprentices are paying is \$400 for a session of school. The union takes care of that. As for all the other health and safety stuff within our collective agreement, that's an employer responsibility.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I think what I'm asking you—because not every apprentice comes through a unionized pathway. I understand that you would be advocating for a unionized pathway. We're very supportive of that, as you can imagine as well. For instance, when my son was at Conestoga College going through pre-apprenticeship, he was working alongside 40-year-olds and 50-year-olds who were training or upskilling or looking for a second career, and it was a hardship. So I'm asking you about the impact of free tuition for skilled trade workers.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** I think it would help.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** You think it would help.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** But I think we've got to be careful in the sense that—Conestoga is a reputable college, so is George Brown and all that, but there are other training facilities out there that I believe are taking advantage of the situation.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I'm very happy you raised that issue. That was part of my next question, because some of those private colleges are pulling in—especially some of our new immigrants, who are looking to be employed very quickly, and they're taking advantage of them.

The government, though, is very supportive of those private colleges, so I think that we have to be mindful of making sure—

**Interjection:** That's not true.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It is absolutely true, and there's an Auditor General's report to prove it.

The free tuition conversation just came up today, so we will get a dollar figure for that, but I do think that waiving any barriers, if you will, to entering into apprenticeships would be very valuable.

I'm just going to move over to you, Melissa, please. Thanks very much for giving us a hard copy of your deputation. On point number 2, you talk about the importance of the Ring of Fire, and I wanted to ask you if you've been following some of the court challenges that we've seen with First Nations around the Ring of Fire. Because there's a reason why development in this very environmentally sensitive property in Ontario has not moved quickly—some of us still call it the ring of smoke—but I think that there are important lessons to be learned from other government mistakes.

Your deputation here doesn't mention the importance of consultation with First Nations. The Ring of Fire has hit a major roadblock because the government has not followed through on their duty to free and prior consent around dealing with First Nations' properties. I just wanted to give you a chance to speak to how important it is to not end up in court and to, instead, do our due diligence as a province and meet First Nations, as Treaty 9 should dictate us to, but also nation to nation. There is an important piece here that's being missed with this consultation, and I just wanted to give you an opportunity to speak to it.

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this. It is a very important point. Of course, Local 793 agrees that the duty of consultation is very important. We recognize that in the course of our organizing activities as we do proactive outreach to northern Indigenous communities where we see upcoming projects happening. That is a key component. But there has to be some balancing of the duty to consult with also having a process that is navigable and can get us to a point where development is happening within a reasonable time frame. The process obviously needs to provide for lots of input—the most amount of input from the impacted groups—and opportunity to talk about impact-benefit agreements and all the benefits that can flow to communities from development as well. I'm not suggesting that that gets bypassed. What I'm suggesting is that there has to be a clear path.

I can speak—not so much because we've had so much experience in Ontario navigating this, because we're still really in the infancy stage of development there. But certainly our experience up in Nunavut, which is a highly regulated system, at the Nunavut Impact Review Board, has been a very disappointing process, I think, for all parties,

and I don't think you'll hear that anyone who has been through the process would say otherwise, because time frames aren't adhered to; they don't seem to mean much. The NIRB will set a deadline; they let it pass.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** The minister will direct them to have a deadline; it passes.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay, so timelines—absolutely. But I hope we can agree that consulting after the fact is why those timelines get stalled. This is what Chief Moonias has said: “We have not given our free, prior and informed consent to these developments.... If the Premier wants to get a bulldozer to cross our river system, he's going to be met by our people.”

1720

That is not a respectful relationship. This has been the history of Ontario: that we are so disrespectful to First Nations, and we try to consult them afterwards or we divide and conquer and we choose a few nations to sort of make a deal with, and then we leave the other five out. That will not lead us to the important infrastructure investment that—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. Your time has expired.

We go to the independents. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Thank you, Andrew and Melissa, for being here today.

I wondered, Melissa, in your written document here you make reference to some of the potential benefits for Indigenous people, and potentially for women as well, in entering your union or the skilled trades. Could you talk a little bit more about how this budget can do that and your own organization's priorities around that?

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** For sure. Thank you. Of course, historically, Local 793 and OETIO have been committed not only to our core partnership programs but offering a path towards apprenticeship through pre-apprenticeship programs. We have a specific program tailored for Indigenous persons that are looking to enter the training; that's an Aboriginal pre-apprenticeship program. The difference is that some of the entrance requirements are not identical, to make sure that we're able to recruit people successfully—people who may not yet have a high school education, for example, or a driver's licence yet—that we're not precluding people from actually wanting to enter the trade.

We're doing that, but we know from experience that right now we need to bring people either to Morrisburg or to Oakville to train, whether it's pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship or any of the skills upgrading training. We do the same with—we work closely with QIA in Nunavut to bring Inuit workers to train in Morrisburg, and we've had a lot of success with that. But that model doesn't work for every pre-apprentice or apprentice that's looking to get into the trade.

The reality is that lots of young people who live on First Nations territory have not really strayed far from home over the course of their life, and the prospect of leaving family, community and perhaps children as well to spend six weeks in southern Ontario, that model doesn't work for

everyone. It's the same with women, right? We see a lot of young women who have young families who want to get into the trades, but they don't see a path to how to make it work because they may not have sufficient family support to do so.

So of course, by bringing the training closer to where people live, we think that that's going to be a key piece of the puzzle. It's not the whole puzzle, but it's a key piece of the puzzle, for sure.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Great. Thanks so much.

A question for either of you: I believe both of your unions stood in support with education workers when their right to strike was removed. Thank you for doing that. I know they appreciate your support as well. I wondered if you are in support of this government's reluctance to repeal Bill 124, which limits education workers' and health care workers' wages—

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Chair, point of order?

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** No, sorry; let me just continue—and the fact that the money for that is not in the budget.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** On a point of order?

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** We're talking about the budget bill here, not Bill 124.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** The member knows what we're talking about, so I presume that she is getting to that point.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Yes. As I said, that was related to the rights of those workers. Now we've got these wage constraints, and this budget does not include money to address that gap. So I'm wondering how you feel about that and how you can reconcile that with your request that we support the budget.

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** Do you want to go first or shall I go first?

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** I came here to speak on the money allotted to the union training centres. I'm not that well versed in what's going on with Bill 124 and that.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** A 1% wage restraint for four years.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** Yes, I understand there were wage freezes before that with other governments too. I just—I support nurses. I believe people should get fair raises. But I don't follow it that closely, sorry.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Fair enough.

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** I'll just offer a quick comment because I know we're running out of time. Of course, Local 793 stands with all workers and we believe that free collective bargaining is a pillar of Ontario. But with respect, I'm not as up to date on this particular bill because I didn't come here today to speak on that bill. I came to speak on this issue as it related to—

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Sorry, let me just—again, because this bill is about the budget—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Thank you very much. That concludes your time.

We're now on the government side. MPP Byers.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Thank you to the presenters. A question to Melissa first. I want to start off by saying that in my youth, which you can tell was a long time ago, I worked in

a rebar yard and was a crane operator and drove a mobile crane across the country. So I just wanted to get a few credentials with you—I was a rebar bender, too.

Anyway, I wanted to follow up on your comment about retirements in the trades and the operators. Can you give a sense of the availability of these kinds of skilled workers in your area going forward? Give us a sense of your view on that.

**Ms. Melissa Atkins-Mahaney:** I can tell you, as the construction season is starting to get into full swing again in Ontario, if you look at the last couple of years at the availability of workers who aren't already otherwise employed, our out-of-work lists are virtually vacant right now—with people who have the actual skills to do the work. The people who are on the list are the people who are very low-skilled, who may only be able to operate one piece of equipment, have only been in the industry a very short time, so they're not really suitable candidates to go out and be a fine-grade dozer operator, right? It takes time in the industry to develop those skills. Of course, training is the first part of it, but once you're trained, you need to get out in the field and actually develop that skill set. So there isn't a huge amount of availability. Those who are qualified are out working.

**Mr. Rick Byers:** Interesting.

Maybe, Andrew, the same question to you in terms of availability of labour in your industry and how it has been and whether you see any trend here or any more availability going forward or not.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** Well, we are dealing with our retiree challenge. It seems like all the unions have the same problem: About 20% of the membership is able to retire, if they could. Thank goodness for divorces, they can't. But we are having challenges. I think some of the challenges are because, like I said, COVID created a huge problem getting people through the training system. We have apprentices waiting to get into school who, if they could get into school, could become journeymen and then the employers could bring in more apprentices, so we are seeing those restrictions. We do see—because of the last couple of years of the big push at the high schools and the trade fairs, we are getting a lot of interest from the young people. We're getting more calls and that, so that's good. I think the bricks-and-mortar money in the budget will allow us to expand to meet our training demands so that we can open up the pipeline.

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

I'll pass it over to MPP Saunderson, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** MPP Saunderson.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I'm going to pick up or tug on that thread that my colleague raised. We heard from you, Melissa, about the real estate purchases you made in order to expand your training programs. And I recall at the end of your talk, Andrew, you talked about how you stand behind the government's initiatives for training but you had concern about space, and I'm wondering if you can tell us about those concerns.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** I was cut off, I guess, but basically, the first rounds of SDF funding and a lot of government funding—I talked about the apprenticeship grants that we

get—are largely focused on equipment, which is great. It allows us to buy new technology so we can train our apprentices in new technology. The unfortunate thing is the old technologies don't go away, so we still have to maintain the old technologies too, because not everybody is moving through—not all companies operate at the same level of technology.

So what's happening is our training centres are running out of room. I can speak for our training centre in Toronto. Basically, what's happening is we are about 42,000 square feet. We have to move stuff into shipping containers and move stuff out of shipping containers depending on the training we're doing. It takes a lot of resources. A lot of damage happens to the stuff. So if we could have access to bricks-and-mortar funding, it would help out a lot in the sense that we could set up permanent labs, have things—we could hire more instructors. Right now, we're very restricted on the space. So the bricks and mortar is like a breath of fresh air. I don't have to tell you what property and buildings are in Toronto right now. It just makes it almost impossible for a union that's based in Toronto that provides training to the province to build. It's almost impossible now.

1730

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** How much time do we have left?

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There seems to be, in your presentations today, a fair bit of overlap in terms of what you're experiencing. I know, Andrew, you're based more in the Toronto area, and Melissa, you're more spread out. Melissa, you've talked at length about your efforts to get Indigenous apprentices, to get women involved. And I'm wondering, Andrew—I know you're based down here—if you have similar efforts for diversity.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** Yes. So when I was talking about my experiences—I'm the business manager of Local 787, which is an Ontario-wide local—our main office is in Toronto, but we have pipe trades offices all over Ontario. Yes, we are working hard to attract women into the trades, and the Indigenous. It gets a little more challenging, as was mentioned, about training. We were working with an initiative—

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** One minute.

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** —to help train the Indigenous. The big problem is that they don't want to leave the reserve sometimes. I can understand that, because some have never left the reserves and coming to Toronto is probably not good for them sometimes. So we are having challenges that way.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Is there any thought in you expanding, I guess, your jurisdiction to have training bases farther north?

**Mr. Andrew Tarr:** Yes. What we do is, for example, in Thunder Bay, we have Local 628, which has an office up there. We share resources. The problem is, Local 628 in Thunder Bay is a very small building, so we're very limited once again on—if we're up there for the week

training, they can't be training. So it comes down to bricks and mortar, and space.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** That concludes your time.

We'll go to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I just want to say thank you to both of you for making the time to come in. It should be noted that the government did not allow a lot of time—I think there were only 36 hours—so you guys got in under the wire, which we do appreciate.

My colleague across the way has put out a challenge to support this budget. I just wanted to take this opportunity to get on the record why we will not, as the official opposition, be supporting this budget. Free and collective bargaining is important in the province of Ontario, and this budget bakes in that 1% hard cap on all workers, including nurses. We know that health care infrastructure is important to the economic well-being of the province. We know that education workers, that those initiatives, actually, to get people trained up are important for the economy of the province—both of which you both support, the economy and people reaching their potential.

Because the government is so committed to violating free and collective bargaining rights, they have already lost at the Superior Court of Ontario on Bill 124. It was found to be unconstitutional. So this government is defending an unconstitutional piece of legislation for unionized workers. Not only did they lose in court, but they're appealing and they're wasting more money fighting this legislation again and again and again.

We can't build this province up without the support of workers and without supporting workers. So we will not be supporting the budget because it misses the moment and it

misses an opportunity to show leadership for workers in the province Ontario. I respect both of you, and I wanted you to know that. No questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We'll then go to the independent. MPP Bowman.

**Ms. Stephanie Bowman:** Well, how do I top that? Goodness. I just wanted to thank you both as well for your work with your unions and your members to make sure that they are in safe workplaces, that they are well trained. We know that they are helping build the province across—whether it's housing, hospitals, schools etc.

Likewise, I find it hard to support the budget given the constraints that—while it's helpful for some groups, and that's good, the fact that this budget is actually hurting health care workers in our health sector makes it something that's hard to support.

I did want to again just say thank you. I hope that your workers will benefit, and I hope that your union continues to have the right to negotiate a fair wage in this province, as they should. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Ernie Hardeman):** We thank the presenters for taking the time to come here and make their presentations. We very much appreciated that. Again, that concludes the presenters today, the last panel.

My next page says—and this is the interesting page, the one I've been looking for all day: That concludes the business for today. Thank you again to all the presenters. As a reminder, the deadline for written submissions is 7 p.m. on Wednesday, April 26, 2023.

The committee is now adjourned until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, when we will resume public hearings on Bill 85. Thank you very much.

*The committee adjourned at 1736.*



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