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Assembly
of Ontario



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(Hansard)**

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Lundi
8 avril 2024

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 8 April 2024

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 8 avril 2024

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 27, 2024, on the amendment to the amendment to the motion regarding amendments to the standing orders.

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Good morning, everyone. I appreciate the privilege to be able to stand here in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to comment on the motion to change the rules that govern the legislative process and the rights of members of the House, among other things.

Changes to standing orders have an impact on members, and a motion to change the rules should be an opportunity to improve the way we function here in this House. Now, with the changes that are being proposed in this motion, I do have some important concerns that I'm here to share this morning.

For one thing, I will say, what a missed opportunity to make things less acrimonious in here by working together on procedural changes instead of being forced to react to what is being decided by the government alone. Because that's what I did—that's what I did when I was asked by a reporter what I thought about the proposed changes, because we didn't know they were coming, and we were not asked to provide any input whatsoever. So, when government drafts bills, they consult with stakeholders. And when government drafts changes to the standing orders, we, the members of this House, are the stakeholders. And I believe that we should be consulted in the process.

I would also like to respond to the government House leader's comment about my ability to be an impartial presiding officer in this place because I reacted to his motion in a political manner. First of all, my role as House leader for my caucus requires me to defend and protect their rights to be able to do their job in this House to the fullest extent possible, just like other officers make political statements when sitting in their seat or outside this House, as members of their own party. Second, I believe that I have proven, since I have been appointed third Deputy Speaker, that when I am in that chair, I wear no colours other than the black and white of the uniform,

going as far as allowing our then interim leader to miss his late show when it could have been easy for me, sitting in that chair, to give him a quick text—but no, I figured it was not my place to do that, because I take my role seriously.

So, going back to the motion itself, the government claims that it is fixing some of the complaints the independent members were expressing; namely, for not being able to respond to ministerial statements. In fact, I can appreciate that the government House leader got tired of having the ungracious task of saying no to our constant and numerous unanimous consent requests. Through 19 days of sitting after we came back in February, we rose 13 times to ask permission to speak, and the government granted it three times.

Now, those three times were not real consent. One was for International Women's Day, when the government had to reverse its refusal following significant public backlash. I think we can all remember that time. There was another one, for Black History Month, which was granted to us—and I think, or suspect, that maybe the government House leader might have been distracted and just omitted to say no. The third one was actually almost an insult, granting us consent to speak to a PMB knowing it wouldn't take place because the member was sick and wouldn't be there to debate it anyway. I will say that the art of mockery in this House has been quite elevated, and I find it is quite a shame.

There are 16 independent members, and our requests for equitable privileges are not unreasonable and are not being met in any way in this motion. Here are the simple things we are regularly being denied when we ask:

—sharing five minutes to speak to private members' public business—not adding more time—just being able to share that five minutes so we can have more people express their support or non-support;

—having eight minutes to speak during an opposition day motion—that's out of a two-hour debate—but, no, that's not acceptable;

—sharing five minutes to respond to ministerial statements; and

—having more questions during question period and, then, the ability to manage them with flexibility.

These repeated requests are not addressed in this motion that proposed the changes to the standing orders. In fact, the independent members are being even further penalized by these changes. The change that would allow us to respond to ministerial statements considers that, out of the eight minutes allocated to the NDP and the independent members together, we may get three minutes or two

minutes or maybe less, because once everyone is done applauding the member who just finished speaking—because that’s usually what happens during responses to ministerial statements—the clock is still running and then it will take a while before the remaining time is handed over to the independents. That’s instead of the firm five minutes we’ve been asking for. So not a real win. But I’m sure the government House leader is expecting us to say thank you, and my colleague from Ottawa South already did that during his debate time.

The other shortfall we are facing is our ability to participate in committee. Not only our automatic right to be appointed as a member of a committee would be removed, to now be at the discretion of the procedure and House affairs committee, dominated by government members, but the motion would also remove the ability of the independent members to substitute for one another on a committee. I mean, people need to understand—and I know, it’s us, we’re nine—it’s challenging enough for us to cover all the important stuff, and if we can’t have the flexibility to cover for one another, it simply steals our ability to participate fully, to move motions or vote on amendments as an important way to ensure that the voices of our constituents are heard throughout the legislative process. I’m thinking specifically, as an example, of the budget consultations by the finance committee that travelled the province. The substitutions we were able to make allowed us to hear from our own communities, something we will likely not be able to do again.

Now, the government House leader mentioned something interesting that exists in the current standing orders that would seem to give more speaking time to independent members. He was referring to standing order 38(b). The government House leader stated, “We created more opportunity for debate in the Legislature by adding a 30-minute report stage when a bill is reported back from committee. What does that mean? Why would any government that has passed a bill add a provision in the standing orders that allows for more debate on a bill that just came out of committee? Why would any sane government with a massive majority, both in the last Parliament and in this Parliament, add this provision? Why did we add the provision? Because it would allow the independents, who don’t necessarily serve on the committee, to have a debate and talk about the issues that they were not able to participate in a committee on and raise that here in the House.”

0910

Now, that may sound like we, the independent members, really haven’t been clever enough to take advantage of this provision. However, the challenge with this provision is that 12 members need to stand up for that 30-minute debate to kick in, and without knowing when a particular bill might be reported back from committee, anyone can see how unreasonable it would be to expect every day to have 12 members ready to stand up. Sometimes there is hardly that number of members total in the House when reports by committees is called during afternoon routine business.

Just a brief word on petitions, just to say what my colleague from Ottawa South has already mentioned—disagreement with the new formula proposed. I also agree with the NDP that 15 minutes per day to hear from our communities on why we’re asking something shouldn’t be too much to ask.

Now, the last time we debated this motion, my colleagues brought forward some amendments. The sub-amendments would direct the Speaker to recognize the independent members during question period for four questions per day, each followed by one supplementary. Currently, independent members only have one or two questions per day, and we are constrained as each member is only permitted to ask one question for eight sitting days. So if someone is sick or cannot be there to do their question for any reason, another member cannot always simply step in and take their place. In contrast, the Conservatives usually have five or six questions per day to which it would not be a problem if these slots were used by members to get real answers for Ontarians and hold the government to account. My colleague from Ottawa South moved that amendment to allow the independent members more questions, and he said, “It would relieve the burden on government members to ask another carbon tax question.” I know it sounds really funny—and my colleague from Ottawa South is a funny and likeable guy, I’m sure you will agree—but the joke is actually not that funny.

Should question period be about pinning the fault of our weaknesses in our responsibilities to Ontarians on another level of government? In the UK Parliament, question time is an opportunity for MPs and members of the House of Lords to question government ministers about matters for which they are responsible.

In the House of Commons, any member can ask a question, although the time is set aside almost exclusively for the opposition parties to confront the government and hold it accountable for its actions and to highlight the perceived inadequacies of the government. It is that part of the parliamentary day where the government is held accountable for its administrative policies and the conduct of its ministers, both individually and collectively—and this is lifted directly from the House of Commons website.

Question period, formally called oral questions, is an important method of ensuring that the government answers to the people, represented by the opposition parties, and is held accountable for its actions. That’s according to the Canadian Encyclopedia.

So this proposed amendment by my colleague from Ottawa South would help in returning question period to what it should be and essentially returning things to the way they were before the 2022 election. It would strengthen our parliamentary democracy and improve government accountability.

Again, it’s not an unreasonable request. The government was willing to implement this change in the last Parliament, and we have even more independent members now than we did then.

So I will conclude by repeating my offer to work with both government House leader and the opposition House

leader if they are interested in making things better around here. There are 16 independent members, and I believe they deserve a voice at the table. I thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

On March 27, 2024, Mr. Jones, Chatham-Kent–Leamington, moved government notice of motion 24 regarding amendments to standing orders.

Mr. Fraser moved an amendment to government notice of motion number 24.

Mr. Hsu moved the following amendment to the amendment to government notice of motion number 24:

That the amendment be amended as follows:

By deleting everything after the word “following” and inserting: “In exercising his discretion under standing order 35(g), the Speaker shall recognize independent members for four questions per day, each followed by one supplementary.”

Is it the pleasure of the House that Mr. Hsu’s amendment to the amendment to the motion carry? I heard a no.

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

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

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Orders of the day, please.

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): This House stands in recess.

The House recessed from 0916 to 1015.

WEARING OF SHIRTS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery on a point of order.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to allow members to wear green shirts in recognition of April 7 being Green Shirt Day and April being donor awareness month.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. McCarthy is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow members to wear green shirts in recognition of April 7 being Green Shirt Day and April being donor awareness month. Agreed? Agreed.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Nickel Belt, I understand, has a point of order.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, if you seek it, you will find that we have unanimous consent for people to wear a ribbon in honour of it being Be a Donor Month, in line with Green Shirt Day as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Nickel Belt is seeking unanimous consent to allow

members to wear green ribbons in honour of Green Shirt Day and donor awareness month. Agreed? Agreed.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr. Anthony Leardi: On March 11 of this year, the LaSalle police force and the Windsor police force joined forces to create something called the offender management unit. This is a special unit whose job it is to seek out and re-arrest people who are found or alleged to be found in breach of their bail conditions. In the first three weeks of operation, police officers re-arrested eight individuals and issued warrants for three more. These are people who have already been charged or convicted with serious offences such as murder, attempted murder, robbery or sexual assault.

The offender management unit was made possible through a grant from this government, under our programming and our specialized attention to the enforcement of this issue.

LaSalle police chief Duncan Davies said, “We are grateful to our provincial partners for coming through on funding this very important initiative....”

Mr. Speaker, I’m grateful too. I’m grateful to our police for catching offenders, putting them behind bars and keeping our communities safe. I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to our police officers.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

M^{me} France Gélinas: April is Be a Donor Month, a month dedicated to raising awareness about organ and tissue donation.

The Trillium Gift of Life network tells us that 90% of Ontarians want to be a donor but only 35% have registered. Right now, there are 1,400 Ontarians that are waiting for a life-saving organ, and, sadly, every three days one of them dies.

Three years ago, Nova Scotia implemented an organ donation system where all Nova Scotians are considered donors unless they opt out. The first year saw an increase of 40% in tissue donations, and the numbers continue to rise.

Ontario is ready for this, Speaker. I have tabled Saving Organs to Save Lives, in memory of Peter Kormos, six times. There is no opposition. Let’s get this done.

But until it happens, I want to thank every Ontarian that has registered to be a donor and save lives. I want to thank Richard St. Amour in my riding that has helped Nickel Belt achieve 57% registrations to be a donor.

Yesterday was Green Shirt Day. Logan Boulet’s organ donation inspired 100,000 Canadians to register as donors after the after the tragic Humboldt Broncos junior hockey team bus crash in Saskatchewan. We wear green to recognize Logan and all the donors that have given and saved lives.

1020

Remember, Speaker: Be a donor. Soyez un donneur.

GRAND RIVER MALAYALEE ASSOCIATION

Ms. Jess Dixon: I'm speaking to some of the politicians in the room, the stuff that we don't always talk about and how it can be quite interesting to be a politician, a person with social anxiety. You have to walk into a variety of events, often by yourself, having no idea what you're going to get. Because of that, when you find a group of people or an organization that you connect with as a politician, that makes you feel incredibly welcomed and supported, it is quite a remarkable thing.

I actually have some guests today who I will introduce later from the Grand River Malayalee Association. I first met these people during the Onam celebrations from last year. I feel like I mention this type of thing a lot, but we connected initially because I turned up in a sari that I hadn't pleated properly, met the president, immediately asked to speak to his wife and ended up having their MC and another person essentially unwrap me and rewrap me in my sari before I went on stage, which is a really wonderful bonding experience that I recommend to everybody.

But since then, I've been to several of their events and I can honestly say I don't think I've ever met a group of people who are more proud to participate in Canadian society. Every time I look, they're canoeing in Algonquin park, they're at Tim Hortons, they're at Canada's Wonderland, they're doing something that shows just how much they love being part of this country. It's such an honour to have them here today. I will introduce them later, but thank you, Speaker, and the Grand River Malayalee Association.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: Kaitlyn Roth was a bright, successful, beautiful young woman. She was a third-year University of Waterloo student who had dreams of working with children with special needs. On April 28, 2022, just four days shy of her 21st birthday, we lost Kaitlyn to mental illness. Long wait-lists and gaps in the system meant she fell through the cracks.

Her parents and members of the Roth family are here today. The Roths are focusing on helping others. The mental health system failed them, but they are fighting for positive change.

Approximately 4,500 people die by suicide each year in Canada. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among young adults.

This afternoon, I will be tabling a petition with over 7,000 signatures. It calls on providing mental health services with a focus on evidence-based, trauma-informed care and to provide funding for alternative-destination clinics in Ontario.

Waterloo Senator Marty Deacon also supports the Roth family with a call for "compassionate, consistent and caring responses at all levels of intervention, support and recovery. Supporting this petition is a strong step forward." Thank you very much.

To honour Kaitlyn's legacy and the many Kaitlyns out there, the Roths have created a foundation to help fill in the gaps, because there were so many gaps in Kaitlyn's journey.

From her parents: "Kaitlyn, our beautiful, brown-eyed girl with the million-dollar smile, we love you always."

We cannot let others slip through the cracks of this broken mental health system.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Steve Clark: Yesterday, the province of Ontario recognized the significance of organ donation and the impact of the Logan Boulet effect. The devastating Humboldt Broncos bus crash deeply affected both our province and our country. Among the 29 passengers, 16 lost their lives while 13 had life-altering injuries. Among those was Broncos defenceman Logan Boulet.

On April 7, 2018, Logan tragically lost his life. But despite this tragedy, Logan and his family's decision to donate his organs saved the lives of six individuals, demonstrating the life-saving power of organ donation. While April 7 continues to invoke painful memories across Canada, it has also become an opportunity for us to promote organ donation awareness. This has led to the establishment of Green Shirt Day and the profound impact of the Logan Boulet effect. Just like Logan and his family, everyone who is comfortable and willing should sign up to donate—that has the power to save so many lives.

I'm proud that a teenager in my riding, Ethan Bos, of St. Michael Catholic High School in Kemptonville, was the impetus for Bill 112, the Green Shirt Day Act. The bill was sponsored by the Honourable Michael Parsa and received royal assent on April 11, 2022. It promotes organ donation across the province.

If you or someone you know wants to register to donate, you can do so at any ServiceOntario location near you, or go online at serviceontario.ca/beadonor to check if you're already registered to be a donor or have an existing registration. Anyone who's an OHIP-eligible Ontarian aged 16 and up can register for this life-saving service.

I want to thank Minister McCarthy for all the promotion through ServiceOntario. I encourage all members to recognize the Logan Boulet effect and support Be a Donor this month.

VOULA SARDELIS

Mr. Joel Harden: Ottawa lost a warrior last week, and warriors come in all shapes and sizes. Voula Sardelis was barely five feet tall. She was living in her 101st year of life, but her stature was towering all the same. From humble beginnings in rural Greece, three years ago, she actually inspired unanimous agreement in this House.

By then, I had worked with Maria, Voula's daughter, for two years. I learned how some caregivers faced unfair retaliations based on complaints they raised, which were legitimate, on behalf of loved ones in retirement homes, long-term-care homes and group homes.

In 2018, after Maria raised those concerns with her mom's care in an Ottawa-based retirement home, she was issued a trespass notice and she was separated from Voula for 316 days. But that act of cruelty sparked a movement for change, and I'm proud to say in Voula's name, as they celebrate her life back home in Ottawa today, that on March 4 in this place, Voula's Law passed. Motion 129 passed, and it was a victory that Voula inspired.

I met Voula personally for the first time on her 99th birthday. She smiled. She reached for my hand and she kissed it. I did my best to dance to Greek music with Maria. It was a remarkable day for a remarkable woman. But let us always remember the power of our elders, and the responsibility for us as legislators to ensure that people with disabilities and seniors get access to their caregivers when they want it. God bless you, Voula.

SIKH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: This April marks the 10-year anniversary of Sikh Heritage Month, a celebration highlighting the contributions of the Sikh community in Ontario. Ontario has one of the largest Sikh community diasporas in the world, with over 200,000 Sikhs residing in the province.

Sikhs believe in five key principles taught by Guru Nanak Dev Ji. They are:

- Vaand Chhako, sharing whatever God has given you and helping those that are in need;
- Kirat Karo, meaning making an honest living;
- Naam Japo, chanting the name of the true God;
- Sarbat Daa Bhalaa, asking god for everybody's happiness; and
- speaking the truth without any fear.

This year, the Sikh heritage initiative has organized many events across the city of Brampton and the province, including a flag-raising, art exhibitions, concerts and a number of workshops. I encourage everyone to attend. Also, there will be a Sikh Heritage Month celebration here at Queen's Park, and I encourage all members to attend as well.

April is also significant to the Sikh community, as they celebrate Vaisakhi, a spring harvest festival and the day the Khalsa was created. Vaisakhi is celebrated by visiting a gurdwara and doing Seva—the act of selfless service to others. Vaisakhi will also be celebrated through the annual Khalsa Day parade which takes place in Toronto, from Exhibition Place to Toronto city hall.

Speaker, I would like to take this moment to wish all Sikh Ontarians and all those celebrating a happy Sikh Heritage Month and happy Vaisakhi.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Michael Mantha: We're just getting back from an awesome constituency week. It's great to see everyone in

here. Like everybody else, I dealt with issues across my riding. Some of them that came across were landlord and tenancy issues; paramedic coverage that is particularly lacking in the Hornepayne and White River area; municipal integrity commissioner office issues that are happening at municipal levels; the Northern Health Travel Grant; the lack of French services in the health care fields, particularly in home care, in the community of Dubreuilville and others—road maintenance is high priority.

1030

But there's something I really want to bring to the floor of the Legislature, and I want to thank two constituents. There are still scams that are going on, and these scams are targeting seniors. The one scam that is going on—on the North Shore, we had a really bad storm a couple of weeks ago, and there were a lot of power outages. There's a 1-800 number that came out that charges people to report power outages through hydro. I'm happy to say that hydro is aware of it, and they're dealing with that scam, and they're trying to find out how people are being charged for reporting their calls. There's also the anti-virus McAfee boondoggle that is going on. That scam is also targeting many seniors.

What I want to say to seniors is: Reach out to your family members and make sure that you have the discussions with them, because if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

NORWICH FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION PANCAKE BREAKFAST

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Last weekend, I had the pleasure to attend the Norwich Fire Fighters Association annual pancake breakfast. Volunteer firefighters spent all morning flipping up delicious pancakes and collecting donations for Norwich Youth Unlimited, also known as the Upper Deck. They're raising funds to renovate their space and provide even more programming for youth in our community. It's a wonderful opportunity to support a great organization in Oxford and thank our volunteer firefighters for their service, all while enjoying a delicious breakfast.

This event was made sweeter not only because of our volunteer firefighters but also because of the maple syrup that was flowing. With the support of amazing local sponsors like Haupt Tree Line Maintenance and Lot 17, families in Norwich enjoyed delicious Oxford maple syrup with their pancakes.

It's been great to see yet another successful syrup season in Oxford, thanks in part to our government's investment of \$1 million through the Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership, which supports the province's maple syrup sector. We're proud to keep producing delicious maple syrup and bring the rest of the world to taste Oxford.

Overall, this was a great weekend highlighting the very best of what Oxford has to offer: coming together to

support a local community organization, dedicated volunteers making it happen and, of course, maple syrup.

I'd like to thank everyone who put this event on and all those who came out in support. I'm already looking forward to next year.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Ms. Christine Hogarth: It's nice to be back. Smiles and the community spirit were in full swing in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, especially with all the Easter bunnies hopping around at our BIAs on Easter weekend, and especially at Mimico Square, where our local artists sold many of their products. Of course, I'm a shopper, so I indulged with a little necklace from a local artist.

From seeing our youngest artists to more experienced artists, I want to highlight the importance of art and the talented and creative individuals from Etobicoke–Lakeshore. We are all blessed every day to see murals on our business walls, on our utility boxes and underneath our bridges, statues and structures, and even the architecture that stands tall on Humber Bay Shores. We are so proud of the community of south Etobicoke.

Etobicoke–Lakeshore is home to many creative people, and today, I'd like to highlight a few. With thanks to the staff and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, each year, youth from 12 to 18 across the province are invited to display their works of art throughout the Legislative Building through the Youth Arts Program. I'm sure many of you working in here admire the beautiful art displayed throughout our halls. This year, two young constituents, Stefania Dedda and Sofia Lebovics, had the pleasure of showcasing their artwork. Thank you for decorating the halls of Queen's Park with your talent.

Through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport and their \$60-million budget to encourage art and culture, we continue to see wonderful programs at Franklin Horner, Arts Etobicoke and MabelleArts, to name a few. Thank you for your continued support of arts in our local communities.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): With us in the Legislature today is a former member of provincial Parliament who served the riding of Stoney Creek in the 38th Parliament, Jennifer Mossop. Welcome back. Great to see you.

Mr. Joel Harden: I'm a very happy man this morning because I'm honoured that members of my family are here today: our daughter, Adele Mary Harden, artist in residence at the Great Canadian Theatre Co., from Canterbury High School; and Dr. Clare Louise Roscoe, part of the Children's Hospital emergency room team, both beloved to me. Thank you for everything both of you do to make me be here. Thank you for coming, guys.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Today, I would like to welcome Gennaro Silvestri from Calgary. He's the CEO of Apé

Canada, and he's here for the Restaurants Canada Show in Toronto.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: I would like to introduce some great people from my riding of Newmarket–Aurora: Manha Yusuf, the page captain this morning; her parents Nisa Chaudhry and Naved Yusuf; her grandmother Zahida Chaudhry; and her sister Laiba Yusuf. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to introduce Michael Roth and Fiona Roth; Molly Roth, Michael Roth—who are siblings of Kaitlyn; Mandie Roth; Julie Roth; Karen Waite; and Eric Philip, who is the CEO of Thresholds, all in support of Kaitlyn Roth today. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Good morning. It's wonderful to be back with all of my colleagues.

As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Long-Term Care and the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility, I would like to welcome Ontario Long Term Care Clinicians to Queen's Park. In the members' gallery, we have Dr. Rhonda Collins, Dr. Benoît Robert, Dr. Janice Legère, Dr. Abhishek Narayan, Ellen Maracle Benton, Krista Hook, Karin Podolyak and finally, former MPP, Jennifer Mossop. Welcome to the House.

Mr. Chris Glover: I'd like to welcome to the House a group of family members whose seniors are being evicted from the Chartwell home in Mississauga: Karen Santaguida, Victoria Santaguida, Sinead Hutchinson, Danielle Colalillo and Stacey Saracini.

Mr. Mike Harris: I have had the pleasure of having two pages here in the Legislature, and we have a third one joining us today. I think he might be on water duty as I don't see him, but Ryder Harris is here for the next three weeks.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It is an absolute pleasure to introduce the backbone of our constituency office: Jean Marc, who's here from Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal: I wanted to welcome the family of today's page captain, Armaan Bagarhy. His sister and family friend, Harman and Rohit, are here just behind me in the public gallery. Welcome to your House.

Ms. Jess Dixon: It's absolutely my pleasure to welcome the subjects of my member's statement this morning, the Grand River Malayalee Association. With us in the House today are Rajeev Pillai, Sudhip Joseph, Rayees Nishad, Selby Sebastian, Keerthik Premkumar, Alan Thomas, Shiny Mathews, Siju John, Merlin Sam and Anjali Sailaja. Welcome to your House and thank you so much for coming.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Pleasure to be here this morning to wish MPP and Speaker of the House Ted Arnott happy birthday.

Applause.

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

I'm pleased to welcome two of my constituency assistants who work with me at the Wellington–Halton Hills provincial riding office: Judy Brownrigg and Karen Thomas. Welcome to the Legislature. It's great to have you here today.

1040

That concludes our introduction of visitors.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Nepean, point of order.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I debated whether or not I should do this because it's so passé, but a couple of weeks ago, myself and the member from Danforth, Peter Tabuns, celebrated our 18th anniversary—together, as one.

Applause.

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

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

This being the first sitting Monday of the month, I ask everyone to stand and join in the singing of the Canadian national anthem, followed by the royal anthem.

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

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

QUESTION PERIOD

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Marit Stiles: Good morning, Speaker. This question is for the Premier. There has been an alarming trend of for-profit primary care clinics popping up all across this province. When Ottawa's South Keys Health Center started charging \$400 membership fees, the minister said she would investigate, but we haven't seen any action from this government. They just shrug it off and blame it on the feds.

My question is to the Premier. Why won't you uphold the values of universal health care and stop these for-profit clinics from charging hundreds of dollars for people to access primary care?

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

Mr. Nolan Quinn: I thank the member opposite for the opportunity to speak about Ontario's health care system. Ontario is leading the country with over 90% of Ontarians having a doctor or primary health care provider. Our government will not tolerate clinics taking advantage of a loophole created by federal legislation. If the federal government doesn't take action to ensure Ontarians and Canadians can access publicly funded health care we will.

Each year our government invests over \$50 million to connect hundreds of thousands of Ontarians to primary care through 25 nurse practitioner-led clinics across the province. In this year's budget, we went even further: Our primary care expansion has expanded to a total of \$546 million over three years to connect 600,000 Ontarians to primary care.

We will continue to work with our health partners across the province to ensure the best public health care for the people of Ontario when and where they need it.

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

Start the clock. Supplementary question?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, patients have already been charged thousands of dollars in illegal fees since this government took office. The minister knows perfectly well that these practices are illegal under the Canada Health Act, but they have refused to investigate or take any action. Instead, the Minister of Health blames patients, saying that extra billing is their "misunderstanding."

Since the minister has clearly taken the side of private companies charging these illegal fees, will the Premier stand up for the protection of patients or not?

Interjections.

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

The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: Thank you again to the Leader of the Opposition. I'm not sure if she heard my answer: We will take action if the federal government doesn't close the federal loophole on that.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is the first jurisdiction to use the nurse practitioner-led clinic model of care and we will continue to use this innovative path of delivery—publicly funded primary care—to connect hundreds of thousands of people across the province to the care they need.

Ontario is leading the country with almost 90% of Ontarians having a family doctor or a primary care provider. Since 2018, we have registered over 12,500 new physicians in Ontario, including a 10% increase in family doctors, but we know more needs to be done. We will always continue to work with our health partners across the province to ensure that Ontario has the best publicly funded health care when and where they need it.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, we'll take action if, we'll take action when—the people of Ontario are demanding action now.

There are countless publicly reported examples of patients who are receiving surgeries in private clinics who are told they have to pay for upgrades for already eligible services. At a time when 2.3 million Ontarians don't have a primary care physician, at a time when the cost of living has become completely unbearable and they can't find a family doctor, why is this Premier expanding for-profit health care that hurts patients and only benefits private shareholders?

Interjections.

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

The parliamentary assistant.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: As I've already stated, Ontario is leading the country with over 90% of Ontarians having a family doctor or a primary care provider. We started with a record investment of \$110 million into 78 new and expanded interprofessional primary care teams and added over 400 new primary care providers to help close the gap in accessing primary care.

In this year's budget, we went even further, Mr. Speaker. Our primary care expansion has expanded to a total investment of \$546 million over three years to connect over 600,000 people with primary care in Ontario.

As I've stated, we will continue to work with the health care partners across the province to ensure that the people of Ontario have the best publicly funded health care when and where they need it, Speaker.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Marit Stiles: I'd say, first of all, they're leading the country in additional fees maybe, but that's about it.

This question is for the Premier. Last week, the federal government offered Ontario \$5 billion in funding to help pay for housing-related infrastructure. All the Premier needs to do is legalize fourplexes and other missing middle homes. That's the kind of action that we in the NDP have been pushing for, and it was even recommended in the province's own Housing Affordability Task Force.

Why is the Premier saying no to legalizing fourplexes and putting billions of federal funding at risk?

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, we're doing no such thing. What the Premier has said, and what we believe, of course, is that municipalities are the best place to decide what type of development should happen in their communities.

We, of course, are looking forward to working as closely as we can with the federal government, but more importantly, we're going to be working with our municipalities to come forward with a team Ontario approach to the federal government's offer over the last couple of weeks.

As you know, there are very few details with respect to what the federal government has put forward but we're going to take the, I would suspect, unusual step of being one of the first governments that will sit down with our municipal partners, work together with them to come forward with a team Ontario approach to how we can ensure the maximizing of this benefit for the people of the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: How's that been working, eh, Speaker? The government is falling far behind their own affordable housing targets.

And 80% of Ontarians can't afford a single detached home. They need other options like semis and townhouses or a home in a fourplex. These options would let more

people stay in the communities that they live in instead of being forced out. This government used to agree with that, but something's changed, and now, the Premier is fearmongering.

So why is the Premier willing to give up, again, billions in federal cash just so he can block people from living where they want to live?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, what we've said is that we're going to work with our municipal partners to see how we can work together to address the funding that has been put forward by the Prime Minister.

We at this point have very few details on what these funds—how they can be used. But we'll work closely with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, with the big city mayors, with the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, with the small urban mayors, and we will come forward with a team Ontario approach to access these federal dollars but at the same time, we have the highest housing starts that we have had over the last couple of years.

We understand there is more work to be done. There is no doubt that the high inflation and high interest rate policies of the federal government, which are a result of the high carbon taxes, are causing some challenges within the home building industry. We will continue to fix some of the problems that we've inherited from the previous Liberal government, and we will ensure that for the people of the province of Ontario the dream of ownership is within everybody's grasp.

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: This government and this Premier used to talk tough on housing. In fact, the Premier used to throw around terms like NIMBY for politicians who got in the way of building affordable housing, and now he's one of them.

This is a classic Conservative flip-flop on one of the most important issues facing people today in this province. Instead of building the housing that we desperately need, we have a Premier who is reversing course, who is ruling out options and sowing fear about density.

So back to the Premier: Is it that he doesn't like fourplexes or is it that he doesn't like people who can't afford single, detached homes?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, that's just classic NDP, right? It's classic NDP.

What we're doing is we're focused on building more homes for the people of the province of Ontario. Do you know how we're doing that? By working with our municipal partners to get the job done.

We have said right from the beginning that the best way to build not 100 homes, not 200 homes but over a million homes would be to get sewer and water infrastructure in the ground. We're talking about building communities, so we're building transit and transportation. The Minister of Education is building schools with one of the largest investments in new schools in the history of this province, the Minister of Transportation is building subways, expanding GO train service and the Minister of Infra-

structure has announced one of the largest programs in sewer and water infrastructure in the province's history—in the history of the province. Because we don't want to build a couple of homes, we want to build 1.5 million of all types of homes, and that's what we're doing. We're building communities for the people of the province of Ontario.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Last week, the Premier said that he wants to get rid of international students in Ontario. He wants Ontario universities to be attended by 100% Ontario students. These statements reveal a stunning lack of understanding not only of the purposes of post-secondary education but also the value that international students bring to our province, which is far more than the tuition dollars they generate to subsidize completely inadequate provincial grants.

Speaker, it's almost as if the Premier wants our post-secondary system to fail. Does he?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): To reply, the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member for that question. Let's talk about what we were doing on Friday: We were announcing a new medical school for York University. Alongside my colleagues and the mayor from Vaughan, we made an exciting, historic announcement.

Let's talk about our government's record in medical seat expansion in this province—three new medical schools in Ontario: a new Scarborough U of T campus, the new TMU medical school and now the York University medical school.

Mr. Speaker, while the opposition votes against every single medical seat expansion that we bring to the table, followed by the Liberal government, who cut medical seats while they were in power, this government, under the leadership of this Premier, will ensure that we have access to primary care in this province.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The Premier is on the record with those comments, but even if those comments only referred to international medical students at this medical school that doesn't have any long-term funding, that does not dig him out of the hole. It's not that medical seats have been occupied by international medical students, it's that students trained in other countries, including those from Ontario, can't get recognized in Ontario. It's also a post-secondary system that has been starved for resources for years. Almost half of our universities, including those with medical schools, are reporting deficits, and this government's budget did nothing to ensure their financial stability.

Instead of dog whistles blaming international students, will the Premier commit to the \$2.5 billion in base funding that the government's own expert panel said—

Interjections.

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

I'm going to caution the member on her choice of words.

Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Jill Dunlop: In 2022 alone, this government added 160 undergraduate seats and 295 postgraduate seats. In budget 2023, we also built on this historic investment by adding an additional 100 undergraduate seats and another 154 postgraduate seats. And, again, in budget 2024, we announced the new medical school at York University. Mr. Speaker, that is almost 900 new medical seats in this province.

Again, to the opposition—I urge you to vote with us to ensure that we open this new medical school and increase the number of medical seats in Ontario.

Unlike the opposition, who will vote against this, this government, under the leadership of Premier Ford, is ensuring that we have more access to medical seats in this province.

TAXATION

Mr. Will Bouma: My question is for the Minister of Energy. The carbon tax does nothing to reduce emissions, it only hurts hard-working people. Just last week, the federal Liberals hiked the carbon tax yet again. They ignored what people across the country have been asking from day one: an end to this disastrous tax. And where were Bonnie Crombie and her Liberal caucus? They did nothing to stop this from happening.

Unlike the independent Liberals, our government knows that taxing Ontarians is not the solution. That's why we are continuing to build on Ontario's clean energy advantage in powering new homes, transit, job creators and more. With shovels already in the ground on major projects, our government is ensuring that people across the province have access to affordable and reliable energy.

Speaker, can the minister please explain why the Liberal carbon tax is punishing Ontario families and businesses?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member opposite for the question. We're ensuring that we have energy in our province that's clean, reliable, affordable and safe, Mr. Speaker, with an emphasis on affordable and reliable.

1100

Last Monday, the Prime Minister jacked up the carbon tax by a staggering 23%. Premier Ford and all of the Premiers—NDP, Liberals and Conservatives alike—wrote a letter to the Prime Minister last week, encouraging him once again to realize the failure of this carbon tax and he responded by saying, “Oh, now, this is a nice irony. Ontario actually started a cap-and-trade program. It was scrapped by Premier Doug Ford”—darned right it was scrapped by Premier Doug Ford, and given the opportunity to scrap that carbon tax, he would do it all over again.

A cap-and-trade system is an increased cost for the people of Ontario, something that our party won't stand

for. Bonnie Crombie, the queen of the carbon tax, sure does.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order.

The supplementary question?

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you to the minister for his response. We know that the carbon tax is making life more unaffordable for everyone, but the federal Liberals and their provincial counterparts continue to turn a blind eye to the hard-working people and businesses in our province. Ontarians should be able to fill up their tank without paying an extra 17 cents per litre and families should not have to choose between heating and eating.

Our government has always and will continue to stand up and fight this regressive tax. We are focused on keeping costs down for Ontario families and businesses and building our clean energy advantage. Can the minister please tell this House if there is anyone who stands to benefit from the Liberal carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker—no one's benefiting from this carbon tax. This is the irony of the Prime Minister's comments last week. He said that we scrapped the cap-and-trade system in Ontario—which we did, because it was driving up the cost of everything.

This is Liberal dynamic math here, Mr. Speaker. When McGuinty was the Premier here, they believed the health tax that they implemented wasn't a tax, it was a premium. It was the largest income tax increase in our province's history. Then they bring in a cap-and-trade system, which is just a tax and driving up the cost of everything.

That's why we scrapped the carbon tax, and we sent Kathleen Wynne for a hike, Mr. Speaker. It was the right thing to do for the people of Ontario. It's about time the Prime Minister woke up to that fact and followed the Premier—

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Wayne Gates: Nearly 200 residents at Chartwell Heritage Glen Retirement received eviction notices. They have until the end of July to leave.

Chartwell, a private, for-profit retirement home and long-term-care provider with an ugly track record of neglect and non-compliance is selling the land to a private developer.

With massive wait-lists for long-term care, retirement homes are increasingly expected to provide direct intensive care. When a retirement home closes, a senior loses a roof over their head and loses their care.

Is this government going to allow Chartwell to throw hundreds of seniors out of their home, potentially to homelessness, to make a quick buck?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, as you know, there are rules in place with respect to retirement homes when they transition. Of course, they are going to require that all of the individuals who are currently resident within that facility are transitioned into a new facility before they can move on out.

At the same time, I know there are a number of subsidies that are being provided to the residents. I know the member for Mississauga–Streetsville has been working very closely not only with the city of Mississauga but with the proponents and residents so we're quite encouraged that all residents will be treated in a respectful manner.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary question? The member for Spadina–Fort York.

Mr. Chris Glover: Mr. Speaker, I hate to contradict the government House leader, but there are family members of the seniors who are being evicted from Chartwell and they have said that the member from Mississauga–Streetsville has not met with them, has not spoken with them even though their seniors are being evicted.

Both the Harris and this Conservative government have given millions of dollars to Chartwell, which is a real estate investment trust, and Chartwell has generated a reported \$7 million for its chair, former Conservative Premier Mike Harris. Now, Chartwell is evicting 200 seniors in Mississauga and these seniors' family members are here. Among them is Karen, whose mother, Joyce, is 92 years old and is not able to eat or sleep because of the anxiety of losing her home.

Will this government stand up for seniors and stop these evictions, or will they allow the tax-subsidized Chartwell corporation to sacrifice seniors in the name of profit?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I do know the member for Mississauga–Streetsville has been working very closely with the city of Mississauga and also with Chartwell, Mr. Speaker. At the same time, there are significant rules that are in place that ensure that Chartwell provides a transition plan for those residents who will be impacted by this—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Hamilton Mountain, come to order.

The next question.

TAXATION

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Just last week, as some kind of April Fool's joke gone wrong, the federal government hiked their carbon tax by a whopping 23%. For many Ontario households, they are already struggling to make ends meet and this is a devastating move that will cost them more of their hard-earned salaries.

Unlike the opposition NDP and independent Liberals, our government has asked the federal government to put

an end to this costly Liberal carbon tax since day one. Ontarians are looking to our government to provide them with some relief to keep costs down. We must continue to advocate for the people of this province and ensure that they keep more money in their pockets.

Speaker, could the minister please share with the House how our government is supporting Ontarians as we continue to fight the carbon tax?

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Many thanks to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for that question.

Speaker, as my colleague just said, the newly raised Liberal carbon tax is a punitive and unwelcome burden on Ontario taxpayers. That's why in my 2024 budget we announced we're extending the gas tax cut and providing billions of savings to Ontarians across the province. This represents one of the largest tax cuts in this province for the people of Ontario this century.

We acted early to provide support for Ontarians and we're not stopping now. We're going to stand with our workers and with our families as we rebuild this economy and keep costs down for every single Ontarian.

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

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you to the minister for that response. I know many people were thrilled to hear about our government extending the gas and fuel tax cuts.

The 2024 budget is an outline of our plan to build a better Ontario, and I could not be more proud of being part of a government that prioritizes Ontario workers, families and businesses, especially in the face of the costly Liberal carbon tax.

As I spoke to people in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora last week, many of them asked the same thing. They asked how it was possible that, during an already incredibly difficult time for families in Ontario, the federal Liberals would ask them to pay even more money on a tax that raises the price of everything.

Speaker, to the minister, what is our government doing to help put a stop to the carbon tax and give Ontarians a much-needed break from the—

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

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Thank you again to the member for that question and for the great work you do here at Queen's Park and in the riding of Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Speaker, every government across this great land should be working together to make life more affordable for the people here and across the country. Unfortunately, it seems that the Liberal plan to tackle affordability is to make life more expensive for the people of Ontario and for the people of Canada.

1110

Speaker, it's possible you heard me call on the federal government—or perhaps my esteemed colleague over here or perhaps our esteemed Premier—to scrap the carbon tax. Maybe you heard that once, maybe you heard it twice, maybe you heard it thrice.

Today, my call is for the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, and the Ontario Liberals: Call your counterparts in Ottawa. Go up the 401 and tell them how much people are hurting across this province and join us in the fight to end this regressive carbon tax.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. People in Durham need health care and need to know that a new Durham hospital is coming. Lakeridge Health convened an expert panel to site a future hospital, and Whitby was chosen.

Premier Ford was a guest on our own local CKDO radio and said, “There is going to be a Whitby hospital. Is it going to be tomorrow? Not tomorrow, but down the road, very shortly, we'll be issuing the planning grants.”

We didn't see any planning grants in this year's budget, but since the Premier clearly promised on the radio to everyone waiting for a Durham hospital, my question is, when will Durham get the planning grant for the new hospital at the proposed Whitby site?

Hon. Doug Ford: Thank you for that question. I find it ironic, coming from the opposition—between the Liberals and NDP, they built no hospitals. We've invested over \$50 billion in building new hospitals. Durham will eventually get their hospital.

But I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker: The mayor of Whitby—it doesn't work. I don't even know if it's legal that she's asking for emails, collecting data—and God knows for what. I have an idea why she's collecting data. But she's holding her little lottery: “You give me your name and your email, I'll put it in my data bank, and guess what? You may get an iPhone watch. You may get a backpack. But guess what? You'll get a membership over at the local workout club.” Who does that? Who absolutely does that? Mr. Speaker, is that legal? Imagine if I went out there and asked for people's emails: “You want a hospital? Send me your email, send me your phone number, and I'll put it in my data bank.” That's what's happening out in Whitby, with the mayor of—

Interjections.

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

The supplementary question?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Attacking municipal leaders for advocating for health care is not appropriate, and the prize that people are actually motivated by is quality and accessible public health care. The real prize people want is the new hospital.

The Premier is dragging his feet on this decision and seems to be backing away from his promise, which is making people very nervous. This Premier gave away MZOs and greenbelt chunks as wedding favours to PC donor developers, so surely he can appreciate that trust feels like too much to ask of people.

PC donor developers are chomping at the bit to develop the environmentally sensitive Carruthers Creek headwaters, and they want the Premier to put a hospital in northeast Pickering. Speaker, make no mistake; allowing

development of the Carruthers Creek headwaters is about speculative profits and not health care.

So my question is whether this Premier will come good on what he told Durham folks and put the Durham hospital in Whitby to meet growing health care needs or if his flip-flopping means that donor developers will be making this decision—

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: What a real shameful question that is, Mr. Speaker. I can't even believe she would actually say what she said. I'll keep it at that.

But what's really staggering is when the mayor of Whitby stands up there with a Liberal MP, telling us we should use our health care funding to build a hospital. She's not informed. She doesn't have a clue what she's talking about. The Liberal MP doesn't have a clue what they're talking about. We can't use that money directed by the federal government to build a hospital. Get your head around that, understand that, because I'll tell you, the federal Liberal MP won't be there much longer, by the way. But when he disappears, and the mayor—we're putting more investments into health care than any government in the history of this province. We're going to continue investing in the nurses, in the doctors, in the infrastructure. That's what we're—

Interjections.

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

Once again, I'll remind members to make their comments through the Chair.

The next question.

OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

Mr. John Fraser: Every one of us in this chamber knows that every day, more and more Ontarians are struggling to pay their bills, to pay their rent, to pay their mortgage, to put food on the table. And every day, more and more families are having to use their credit card instead of their OHIP card just to get their son or daughter the basic medical attention that they need.

By any measure, Speaker, life is harder for most Ontario families, except for the Premier and his office. At a time when Ontario families are struggling, how does this Premier justify increasing the staff in his office from 20 to 48 and more than doubling his budget to \$6.9 million?

Hon. Doug Ford: The nerve of the member, to say about saving taxpayers money. Your leader, Bonnie Crombie, called the tax break that we gave on gas a gimmick. We know that she's increasing her gas tax 10.7 cents; that's her plan, number one. She called about the stickers on the back of the vehicles, licence stickers—she would bring those back too, and charge people. She'd be against getting rid of the tolls.

You say about affordability, but you, sir, vote for a tax increase on every item that we put forward, along with your leader. There's one thing that the Liberals and NDP

understand in this province: increase taxes; take money out of people's pockets until they can't even go buy a burger at the corner store.

I was at Restaurants Canada, and all they're saying is, "We need more relief." Well, the Liberals and the NDP—we saw what happened for 15 years: They increased taxes, drove 300,000 jobs—

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

Once again, I'll remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

The supplementary question?

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the gravy train has pulled in to the Premier's office, and friends, insiders, fat cats—well, they all get a free ride. They all get a free ride, Speaker. I guess it's no surprise, because never has there been a government that has spent so much, borrowed so much, incurred so much debt to do so little.

And in the Premier's office, all of those 48 staff make more than the median family income in Ontario—some of them double, some of them triple, some of them quadruple the median family income, Premier.

Is the Premier so out of touch, Speaker, that he thought it was a good idea to raise his office budget by more than \$4 million and that each of his 48 staff make more than the median Ontario family?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Nepean will come to order.

The Premier to reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: Speaker, when they were in office, they increased taxes 45 times—billions of dollars—and chased 300,000 jobs out of the office compared to us. We have never raised a tax. We increased revenues by \$64 billion and never increased a tax. We decreased taxes. We put money back in people's pockets, until they'll be able to maybe go out and buy a hamburger or go to the local store or go to the local restaurant.

But guess what, Mr. Speaker? The—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Premier will take his seat for a moment.

The member for Ottawa South must come to order.

The Premier has a few more seconds to reply.

Hon. Doug Ford: There's one thing Bonnie Crombie understands: increase the carbon tax, increase gas taxes, increase everything to do with buying food. That's all they understand is tax, tax, tax.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we're going to reduce taxes—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South will come to order. The Premier will come to order. The member for Nepean will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Orléans will come to order. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): You're on your best behaviour today.

If we could start the clock.

1120

TAXATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: To build on that last response, my question is for the Minister of Energy. Across Canada, elected officials of all political stripes have called on the federal government to scrap the carbon tax. Even the Liberal Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador spoke out against the 23% hike. And yet, the federal Liberals decided to follow through with their decision and increase this punitive tax.

Last weekend, I was in the town of Sunderland as they hosted their annual maple syrup festival. As sweet as that festival was, I spoke with constituent after constituent who expressed how the carbon tax was souring their day-to-day lives.

My constituents and Ontarians deserve better. Can the minister please share with my constituents and Ontarians how we are fighting the punishing carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks very much to the great member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, one of the sweetest members of this Legislature, no doubt, who has concerns and has shared them with us here at the Legislature that she's been hearing from her constituents. But it is not just constituents from Kawartha Lakes-Brock that are feeling the impact of the punitive carbon tax, it's residents of Toronto, it's resident of London, it's resident of Ottawa, it's residents right across the country, because of Prime Minister Trudeau's massive increase to the carbon tax on April 1, last Monday. It's having an impact at the grocery stores. It's having an impact at the gas pumps. It's having an impact on your home heating.

So what we've done is ensure that we've reduced the cost of gasoline by 10.7 cents a litre. We're making sure that there's an Ontario Electricity Rebate for the people of Ontario. We've eliminated fees and tolls and licence plate sticker fees. And we've introduced One Fare for transit riders right across the GTHA. Every step of the way, we're doing everything we can to make sure that life is more affordable for the people of Ontario while the queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, and her pal Justin Trudeau are driving up the carbon tax by a whopping 23% last week—

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

The supplementary question?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you to the minister for his leadership in fighting against this carbon tax. The carbon tax is pushing up prices across the board, affecting everything from fuelling our cars to heating our homes. The farmers told me the cost of how much it is to dry the seeds in their dryers. It's hurting our economy and placing undue burden on the hard-working individuals and businesses of our province.

Speaker, come on. During a period of high interest rates and living expenses, Ontarians need financial relief, not higher taxes. Our government, under Premier Ford, has consistently opposed this regressive tax from the outset. The opposition NDP and the Bonnie Crombie Liberals continue to remain silent. They're ignoring their constituents.

Could the minister please tell the House more of what our government is doing to fight this carbon tax?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again to the member. We scrapped cap-and-trade. We have fought the carbon tax all the way to the Supreme Court. And credit where credit is due, the NDP have actually voted with us to scrap the carbon tax in this House. They have actually asked us to do that. But you know who hasn't? The queen of the carbon tax, Bonnie Crombie, and the Liberal caucus, who still believe that the people of Ontario are better off with the federal carbon tax than we would be without. It's unacceptable.

We've done everything we can to get this message through to the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau. As a matter of fact, the Premier sent him off another letter last weekend, encouraging him to step away from this harmful policy. But what did he do? He said, "Well, we wouldn't have this carbon tax if we still had cap-and-trade." That is just another energy tax, Mr. Speaker.

What we're saying is get rid of the carbon tax. Get rid of cap-and-trade. Make life more affordable for the people of Ontario today. He could have done it last Monday. He still has time.

ADDICTION SERVICES

MPP Jamie West: My question is for the Premier. Sudbury has one of the highest opioid mortality rates in Ontario, and our only supervised consumption site, the Spot, just closed. It closed because the Conservative government chose not to provide any provincial funding. The Spot is health care. Health care is a provincial responsibility. And the Premier refused to fund it. The Spot has had an application in for two years and seven months. And the Premier refused to fund it. When it opened, the Spot ran for 16 months using only municipal funding and local donors, all because the Premier refused to fund it.

My question is, why did the Premier refuse to fund the Spot and save lives?

Interjections.

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

The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Nolan Quinn: I thank the member opposite for that question.

The Premier and the minister have been very clear: All sites need to be in compliance with the requirements as set out in their funding agreements. CTS sites are expected to build trust in the communities where they are located through consultation and ongoing engagement. We understand the importance of community feedback in this

matter. These reviews will inform the next steps taken by the Ministry of Health. All applications for new CTS sites currently with the ministry are on pause.

We will continue to work with our health care partners across the province to ensure that people have health care when and where they need it.

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

MPP Jamie West: Back to the Premier: Quite frankly, no one believes it.

Let me tell you about James Gough. James was a former addict. He told me that the Spot staff saved his life when he overdosed. He said that if the Spot wasn't there, he wouldn't be alive today. He said that without them, he would be one of the white memorial crosses downtown. The Spot saved James's life. So James volunteered at the Spot to save more lives, so that we would have fewer memorial crosses.

My question is, why won't the Premier help save more lives like James's by funding Sudbury's supervised consumption site?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for the question.

Mr. Speaker, we've done more as a government to support harm reduction programs in the province of Ontario than any government has in the past, including the Liberals supported by the NDP.

Last year alone, we invested over \$75 million to support harm reduction programs in Ontario, including \$12 million for needle exchanges and single-use sterilization and injection equipment; \$22 million for naloxone distribution, free to anyone who wants it; mandatory on-site naloxone for high-risk workplaces; \$9 million for street-based outreach programs and HIV/hepatitis C education and prevention programs.

We know the value of harm reduction, and we're making those investments. And we're determined to meet people where they are, but we're not going to keep them there. We're going to help them recover.

Mr. Speaker, our support for evidence-based harm reduction programs is clear, and we're going to continue investing to help the—

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

Next question.

TAXATION

Mrs. Daisy Wai: My question is for the Associate Minister of Transportation. People in my riding of Richmond Hill were upset to see the federal Liberals proceed with their 23% tax hike last week.

Since the implementation of this regressive tax, Ontarians across the province are paying more for groceries, for services and for fuel.

And to make things worse, the federal Liberals are planning another six increases by 2030. That is not right.

The carbon tax is making life more expensive for everyone, including our trucking industry. Truckers have a critical role in transporting the goods we need in our daily lives. They should not be forced to pay unnecessary costs.

Can the minister please explain the impact of the federal carbon tax on Ontario's trucking industry?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Thank you to the member from Richmond Hill for her advocacy.

The people of Ontario watched in dismay as the federal Liberals imposed a staggering 23% carbon tax increase.

Mr. Speaker, think about this: The solar eclipse brings darkness here for a few minutes in Canada, but the carbon tax will bring darkness to every single household in Canada every single day. From the grocery stores to the gas pumps, the tax is draining the pockets of the people of Ontario.

It doesn't stop there. Like the member mentioned, the federal Liberals plan to introduce six more hikes by the end of the decade.

And the truckers are the unsung heroes of our province in keeping essentials moving, but this tax forces them and all of us to pay more of a premium on essential goods.

1130

Our message is clear: We will fight the carbon tax and—

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

The supplementary question?

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you, Minister, for your response.

The hard-working people in our trucking industry are responsible for delivering goods that keep Ontario moving. They deserve our support. The impact of the carbon tax on this critical industry affects all families and businesses in every corner of this province. The cost to fuel the trucks to transport the goods is passed on to the consumers as they purchase their daily necessities.

We know that the NDP and the Liberal members in this House won't speak up on behalf of their constituents. That is why our government will not stop fighting until this punitive tax is eliminated once and for all.

Speaker, can the minister please further explain the financial impact the carbon tax has on Ontario's truckers?

Hon. Vijay Thanigasalam: Let's be clear: The truckers, who are the drivers of our economy, are being hit hard by this unnecessary carbon tax. While drivers are taking the weight, the Ontario Liberals and Bonnie Crombie sit silent with no relief, no support and no solutions. The tax is a burden on every Ontarian, from the price of a loaf of bread to keeping our homes warm. It's a chain reaction started by a tax that takes more from those who already give so much to keep our economy moving.

We ask the Ontario Liberals and NDP to step up and do the right thing, and join us in the fight against the carbon tax, Mr. Speaker. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, this government and this transportation minister and these caucus members will fight the carbon tax and we will stand with truck drivers.

FOREST INDUSTRY

MPP Lise Vaugeois: Speaker, my question is to the Premier, through you: Last week, the Premier told reporters that the Terrace Bay mill is not likely to reopen. That's an awful way for the people of Thunder Bay–Superior North to hear that the government has given up on the mill.

Forestry experts are telling you sustainably produced forest products are climate-friendly, in demand and can provide a much greater contribution to Ontario's economy than they do now. The closure not only affects all the families and businesses in Terrace Bay and Schreiber, it affects workers and families throughout the entire region: about 10,000 people.

Is this government giving up on the pulp and paper industry?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Graydon Smith: Mr. Speaker, I'm incredibly disappointed at the member across the way, that she would characterize the Premier's statements supporting workers in this province as anything but just that.

But it's typical, Mr. Speaker, that they just don't get the brief right. They don't hear and see what is going on, what this government is doing for northern Ontario. Of course we want that mill open in Terrace Bay, and we've talked numerous times with leaders in the area about how we're working on doing that.

More importantly, Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is saying, "We look after workers in this party," and everybody in the north knows that, because everybody is tired of 15 years of disrespect during the previous government when they were linked up with the opposition that did nothing for the north.

So, again, no lessons from the opposition today. We're working for the people of Terrace Bay. We're working to get that mill back open. We're making investments—

Interjections.

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

The supplementary question?

MPP Lise Vaugeois: There has been no substantive communication with anyone local throughout this entire process. From the beginning, I told the minister's office there were employee buyout models and there were First Nations interested in partnering, yet no one from the government has ever reached out to anyone to talk about these options. No one from this government has reached out to the federal minister to discuss options. The need for cardboard has not suddenly disappeared.

The people of Terrace Bay, Schreiber and the entire region of northwestern Ontario want to know: Why have you given up so easily?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I remind the members to make their comments through the Chair.

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Graydon Smith: What is clear is our commitment, every day, to the people in Terrace Bay, our commitment to northern Ontario, our commitment to the forestry sector and our commitment to working with Indigenous communities and creating opportunities.

We could tell stories, time after time after time, about the investments that we've made. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we continue to make those investments today. I've talked about the biomass program that we've expanded for the next three years—\$60 million of investment strictly for northern Ontario to grow and prosper, to work with Indigenous communities, to find new pathways. That's just part of what we are doing.

What we are doing is looking at an integrated forestry sector—how it works together. Terrace Bay is part of that. Opportunities that will come in the future are certainly part of that.

The NDP never understood forestry. They show their ignorance every time they stand up. We're working on behalf of the forestry sector here in Ontario. We'll continue to do it every single day.

TAXATION

Mr. Dave Smith: I'd like to wish everyone a belated happy Tartan Day; that was on Saturday.

My question is for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development. The people of northern Ontario are being treated unfairly by the federal Liberal government. The cost of transporting goods is already much higher in the north than anywhere else in the province. It's a vast land where many individuals have to travel by car, and in many cases large vehicles are needed for safety due to the many backroads and unpredictable weather conditions. It's not fair that they're being hit hardest at the gas pumps and in the grocery stores.

Speaker, while our government's position on the carbon tax has always been crystal clear, the NDP and the Liberals representing these communities continue to ignore their concerns. It's time to scrap the carbon tax.

Speaker, can the minister please explain how the carbon tax negatively affects northern municipalities?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Writ large across the region of northern Ontario, Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious matter.

Over the past couple of weeks, the Minister of Energy and I have been talking with First Nations leaders from the Matawa communities. These are the final five, in the spirit of basketball, and I'll tell you something, Mr. Speaker, what they have in common is that they're still all on diesel, but they are seriously motivated, as never before, to try and understand what kinds of opportunities the province of Ontario can give them to provide relief from diesel fuel.

It's environmentally irresponsible. It needs to stop, Mr. Speaker, and those conversations culminated in an announcement by our Premier in beautiful Kakabeka Falls just last week to begin more formal discussions about how we can bring clean, green electricity to their regions and

get them off costly diesel, which now, with the carbon tax, the price is going to grow exponentially.

It's time to scrap the tax, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you to the minister for that answer.

The carbon tax is, in essence, a tax on everything: your groceries, your gas, heating your home and so much more. It is not right. The businesses and families in northern communities are negatively impacted because of this regressive tax. Rather than offering support, the Liberals and the NDP have turned their backs on northern communities.

Unlike other parts of our province, northerners face unique challenges when it comes to fuel costs that need to be understood and to be respected. It's disappointing to see how the opposition continues to underplay the repercussions of the carbon tax on northern and Indigenous communities.

Speaker, can the minister elaborate on the detrimental effects the carbon tax is having on people, communities and the businesses all across the north?

Hon. Greg Rickford: It doesn't take long to do the math, Mr. Speaker. My understanding is that, as of April 1, 24 cents of the price per litre of diesel is levied through the carbon tax. The multiplier on that to keep diesel generation for communities with populations of anywhere from a couple of hundred people to over 1,000 is unthinkable, not to mention the fact that when the federal Liberal government put a policy precedent forward to respond to a region's particular needs out on the east coast, they failed to remember the hardships or think of the hardships that are incurred by isolated communities in northern Ontario.

1140

A responsible government puts policy contours into action that relieve people from the cost. So we cut the gas tax. We provided a cut to the cost of fuel to transport goods into the isolated north, and what did the federal government do for the isolated communities in northern Ontario? I think the member from Kiiwetinoong knows.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: My question is to the Premier. Last week, the Globe reported that his Attorney General refused to meet the Federation of Ontario Law Associations, an organization that represents 46 district and county law associations—literally thousand of lawyers across Ontario. They have expressed outrage, Speaker, and grave concern that this government is admittedly out to politicize judicial appointments by hand-picking Conservative and like-minded judges. FOLA wonders why the Attorney General is so afraid to meet with one of the ministry's most important stakeholders, the actual legal community that's keeping our justice system running.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question because it gives me an opportunity to talk about the thousands of lawyers and the associations that I talk to on a regular basis. I can't say that I can be any more accessible, whether it be through social media or whether it be with meeting and phone-calling on a continuous basis.

Now, this issue in particular, I think we've had lots of debate about that, both within the House and in public. Let's be clear. We do want to make sure that people are held to account. We do want to make sure that perpetrators of crime are kept in jail. We do want to put our best foot forward when it comes to making appointments, but there is a process. It's a committee that makes recommendations, and I'll make no apologies for that. We are making excellent appointments across the board.

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

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The Attorney General's simply asking FOLA to submit their questions to him in writing and then he'll get back to them in writing. Is that how you treat one of the most important stakeholders that you have in your ministry?

The Ontario association of family lawyers has warned that the Premier's political interference meddling could result in judges being appointed without any experience in the areas of law that they adjudicate. "It would be like going to an artist for an oil change," wrote family law association co-founder Mary Reilly.

Speaker, will the Premier explain to Ontarians why, if they are facing a criminal case, a gun violence case, a divorce case, a custody case, a Conservative Party supporter is more qualified to decide who presides over the trial than someone who actually is qualified and has the merit to do so?

Hon. Doug Downey: I would ask the members opposite to indicate one of the hundred judges that I've appointed—one of them—that isn't qualified and doing a good job. I can tell you that I engage with the community on a regular basis. I was at a swearing-in last week and talked with former presidents of FOLA, among many others. I was a member of FOLA in my private practice for decades. I have all the time in the world for different legal organizations: the Ontario Bar Association, the Advocates' Society, the Toronto law association. There are many who are engaging in constructive discussion. We can do that without specific meetings on specific topics. There are so many things we have to discuss, and I'll continue to make myself available to all of the organizations.

TAXATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is for the Associate Minister of Small Business. Businesses in Oxford are telling me that they are facing unprecedented economic challenges due to the carbon tax and high interest rates. It increases their expenses and makes operating their businesses more challenging.

Speaker, that's why I was honoured to see our Premier last week, along with the associate minister and other cabinet ministers, rally against the federal carbon tax hike. They were joined by groups like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and Food and Beverage Ontario to come together and took a stand against the job-killing tax.

I know the associate minister spoke with these industry leaders about the harmful impacts small businesses are experiencing due to the carbon tax. Can the associate minister inform the House about what she heard from them directly?

Hon. Nina Tangri: Thank you very much to that great, dedicated member from Oxford for raising such an important question.

The message resonating from groups representing farmers, food processors, truckers, agri-food workers, and so many other sectors was resoundingly clear. From the Beef Farmers of Ontario and chicken farmers to the dairy farmers and grain growers to the greenhouse vegetable growers and fruit and vegetables growers' associations, our agricultural entrepreneurs have warned that spiking costs from the carbon tax are severely undermining their viability and ability to get food on to tables across our province and beyond.

Let's be crystal clear what the opposition supports when they back the Trudeau Liberals' carbon tax: They support increased costs that will hammer small businesses, industries and families in Ontario. They support skyrocketing fuel costs that will make it more expensive to transport goods and services. They support soaring heating bills that will stretch household budgets even further.

This Premier, this government have the backs of our small businesses and consumers. We will continue to call on the federal Liberals to scrap the tax.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has a point of order.

Mr. Rick Byers: It's my pleasure to introduce Monica Singh Soares to the gallery today, a proud mother of page Bella-Sitara and a great councillor for the municipality of Southgate. Welcome to your House.

DEFERRED VOTES

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on the amendment to the amendment to government notice of motion number 24 regarding amendments to the standing orders.

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

The division bells rang from 1146 to 1151.

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

On March 27, 2024, Mr. Jones, Chatham-Kent–Leamington, moved government notice of motion number 24.

Mr. Fraser moved an amendment to government notice of motion number 24.

Mr. Hsu moved the following amendment to the amendment to government notice of motion number 24:

That the amendment be amended as follows:

By deleting everything after the word “following” and inserting: “In exercising his discretion under standing order 35(g), the Speaker shall recognize independent members for four questions per day, each followed by one supplementary.”

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

Ayes

Blais, Stephen	Clancy, Aislinn	McMahon, Mary-Margaret
Bowman, Stephanie	Fraser, John	Schreiner, Mike
Brady, Bobbi Ann	McCrimmon, Karen	Shamji, Adil

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

Nays

Anand, Deepak	Gretzky, Lisa	Rickford, Greg
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Grewal, Hardeep Singh	Sabawy, Sheref
Babikian, Aris	Hardeman, Ernie	Sandhu, Amarjot
Bailey, Robert	Harden, Joel	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Barnes, Patrice	Harris, Mike	Sarrazin, Stéphane
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Hogarth, Christine	Sattler, Peggy
Bouma, Will	Holland, Kevin	Saunderson, Brian
Bourgouin, Guy	Jones, Trevor	Scott, Laurie
Bresee, Ric	Jordan, John	Shaw, Sandy
Burch, Jeff	Kanapathi, Logan	Smith, Dave
Byers, Rick	Kernaghan, Terence	Smith, David
Calandra, Paul	Kerzner, Michael S.	Smith, Graydon
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Khanjin, Andrea	Smith, Laura
Clark, Steve	Kusendova-Bashta, Natalia	Smith, Todd
Coe, Lorne	Leardi, Anthony	Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie)
Crawford, Stephen	Lecce, Stephen	Surma, Kinga
Cuzzetto, Rudy	Lumsden, Neil	Tabuns, Peter
Dixon, Jess	MacLeod, Lisa	Tangri, Nina
Dowie, Andrew	Mamakwa, Sol	Taylor, Monique
Downey, Doug	Martin, Robin	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Dunlop, Jill	McCarthy, Todd J.	Tibollo, Michael A.
Fife, Catherine	McGregor, Graham	Triantaflopoulos, Effie J.
Flack, Rob	Mulroney, Caroline	Vanthof, John
Ford, Doug	Pang, Billy	Vaugeois, Lise
Ford, Michael D.	Parsa, Michael	Wai, Daisy
French, Jennifer K.	Pasma, Chandra	West, Jamie
Gallagher Murphy, Dawn	Piccini, David	Williams, Charmaine A.
Gates, Wayne	Pierre, Natalie	Wong-Tam, Kristyn
Gélinas, France	Pirie, George	Yakabuski, John
Ghamari, Goldie	Quinn, Nolan	
Glover, Chris	Rae, Matthew	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Trevor Day): The ayes are 9; the nays are 91.

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

Is the House ready to vote on the amendment to the main motion? I heard a no.

This House stands in recess until 1 p.m.
The House recessed from 1156 to 1300.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to their question given by the Premier regarding the Premier's office budget. This matter will be debated tomorrow following private members' public business.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Catherine Fife: They're on their way up from downstairs, but the entire Roth family is here to be present for the first petition, on mental health, for their daughter Kaitlyn.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RICHARD CROSBY INVESTMENTS LIMITED ACT, 2024

Ms. Hogarth moved first reading of the following bill:
 Bill Pr43, An Act to revive Richard Crosby Investments Limited.

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

First reading agreed to.

2038778 ONTARIO LTD. ACT, 2024

Mr. Harden moved first reading of the following bill:
 Bill Pr44, An Act to revive 2038778 Ontario Ltd.

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

First reading agreed to.

PETITIONS

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is my pleasure to present for the first time the "Mental Health Services in Ontario" petition. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is currently a lack of consistent mental health intake policies and care across Ontario when people seek assistance at hospitals;

"Whereas staff training and readiness to support patients with mental health issues at Ontario's hospitals lacks consistency and is not sufficiently trauma-informed or evidence-based;

"Whereas current discharge procedures often leave vulnerable people without access to adequate care or support;

"Whereas approximately 4,500 people die by suicide each year in Canada and suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults ages 15 to 34; and

"Whereas the experience of Waterloo's Roth family in the death of their daughter Kaitlyn has brought to light serious flaws in mental health discharge procedures;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to earmark funding for dedicated training for staff providing mental health services with a focus on evidence-based, trauma-informed approaches, to review intake and discharge procedures to ensure consistency of care, and to provide funding for alternative destination clinics in communities across Ontario."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature, present these 7,000 signatures, and also to honour the life of Kaitlyn Roth.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: I have a petition to raise social assistance rates.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's social assistance rates are well below Canada's official Market Basket Measure poverty line and far from adequate to cover the rising costs of food and rent: \$733 for individuals on OW and \$1,308 for ODSP;

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

"Whereas small increases to ODSP have still left these citizens below the poverty line. Both they and those receiving the frozen OW rates are struggling to survive at this time of alarming inflation;

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

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

I'm happy to support this and affix my name and send it with new page Nate.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the Roth family for channelling their grief into advocacy, and also the member for Waterloo for the petition that she has brought to this chamber today entitled "Mental Health Services in Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is currently a lack of consistent mental health intake policies and care across Ontario when people seek assistance at hospitals;

“Whereas staff training and readiness to support patients with mental health issues at Ontario’s hospitals lacks consistency and is not sufficiently trauma-informed or evidence-based;

“Whereas current discharge procedures often leave vulnerable people without access to adequate care or support;

“Whereas approximately 4,500 people die by suicide each year in Canada and suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults ages 15 to 34; and

“Whereas the experience of Waterloo’s Roth family in the death of their daughter Kaitlyn has brought to light serious flaws in mental health discharge procedures;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to earmark funding for dedicated training for staff providing mental health services with a focus on evidence-based, trauma-informed approaches, to review intake and discharge procedures to ensure consistency of care, and to provide funding for alternative destination clinics in communities across Ontario.”

I support this petition, affix my signature and send it to the table with page Aislyn.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Aislinn Clancy: I’m here to present a petition to protect tenants.

“Whereas Ontario is dealing with a massive housing crisis; and

“Whereas housing is a fundamental human right; and

“Whereas affordable rentals are becoming harder and harder to find; and

“Whereas a few predatory landlords are unnecessarily forcing people from their homes under the guise of renovations or to pay rents they cannot afford; and

“Whereas in addition to building new affordable supply we need immediate solutions to keep people housed;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reinstate real rent controls and increase tenant protections in order to preserve our existing affordable rental stock and keep people housed.”

I agree and support this petition. I will sign it and pass it to page Mariam.

1310

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to thank the member from Waterloo, who has brought thousands of signatures from across Ontario—including from James Fessler from Niagara Falls—for mental health services in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly...:

“Whereas there is currently a lack of consistent mental health intake policies and care across Ontario when people seek assistance at hospitals;

“Whereas staff training and readiness to support patients with mental health issues at Ontario’s hospitals lacks consistency and is not sufficiently trauma-informed or evidence-based;

“Whereas current discharge procedures often leave vulnerable people without access to adequate care or support;

“Whereas approximately 4,500 people die by suicide each year in Canada and suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults ages 15 to 34; and

“Whereas the experience of Waterloo’s Roth family in the death of their daughter Kaitlyn has brought to light serious flaws in mental health discharge procedures;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to earmark funding for dedicated training for staff providing mental health services with a focus on evidence-based, trauma-informed approaches, to review intake and discharge procedures to ensure consistency of care, and to provide funding for alternative destination clinics in communities across Ontario.”

I wholeheartedly support this petition, affix my name and send it down to the table with Ruby.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to be able to read this petition today. Thousands of people have signed this in the Waterloo area calling for mental health services in Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is currently a lack of consistent mental health intake policies and care across Ontario when people seek assistance at hospitals;

“Whereas staff training and readiness to support patients with mental health issues at Ontario’s hospitals lacks consistency and is not sufficiently trauma-informed or evidence-based;

“Whereas current discharge procedures often leave vulnerable people without access to adequate care or support;

“Whereas approximately 4,500 people die by suicide each year in Canada and suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults ages 15 to 34; and

“Whereas the experience of Waterloo’s Roth family in the death of their daughter Kaitlyn has brought to light serious flaws in mental health discharge procedures;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to earmark funding for dedicated training for staff providing mental health services with a focus on evidence-based, trauma-informed approaches, to review intake and discharge procedures to ensure con-

sistency of care, and to provide funding for alternative destination clinics in communities across Ontario.”

Of course, I support this petition, will affix my signature and send it to the table with Shiara.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

MPP Jamie West: I want to thank the Roth family for all these petitions and the member for Waterloo for sharing them with us. It’s the “Mental Health Services in Ontario” petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is currently a lack of consistent mental health intake policies and care across Ontario when people seek assistance at hospitals;

“Whereas staff training and readiness to support patients with mental health issues at Ontario’s hospitals lacks consistency and is not sufficiently trauma-informed or evidence-based;

“Whereas current discharge procedures often leave vulnerable people without access to adequate care or support;

“Whereas approximately 4,500 people die by suicide each year in Canada and suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults ages 15 to 34; and

“Whereas the experience of Waterloo’s Roth family in the death of their daughter Kaitlyn has brought to light serious flaws in mental health discharge procedures;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to earmark funding for dedicated training for staff providing mental health services with a focus on evidence-based, trauma-informed approaches, to review intake and discharge procedures to ensure consistency of care, and to provide funding for alternative destination clinics in communities across Ontario.”

I support this petition. I’ll affix my signature and provide it to page Emirson for the table.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank Dr. Sally Palmer from McMaster University for her efforts to collect signatures on a petition to raise social assistance rates.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas an open letter to the Premier and two cabinet ministers, signed by over 230 organizations, recommends that social assistance rates be doubled for both Ontario Works” and the ODSP;

“Whereas the recent small increase of 5% for ODSP still leaves these citizens below the poverty line. Both they and those receiving the frozen” Ontario Works “rates are struggling to survive at this time of alarming inflation;

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

“We, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly to double social assistance rates for” Ontario Works “and ODSP.”

I fully support this petition, affix my signature and will send it to the table with page Nate.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} Jennifer K. French: J’ai une pétition pour soutenir le système d’éducation francophone en Ontario.

« À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Alors que les enfants francophones ont un droit constitutionnel à une éducation de haute qualité, financée par les fonds publics, dans leur propre langue;

« Alors que l’augmentation des inscriptions dans le système d’éducation en langue française signifie que plus de 1 000 nouveaux enseignants et enseignantes de langue française sont nécessaires chaque année pour les cinq prochaines années;

« Alors que les changements apportés au modèle de financement du gouvernement provincial pour la formation des enseignantes et enseignants de langue française signifient que l’Ontario n’en forme que 500 par an;

« Alors que le nombre de personnes qui enseignent sans certification complète dans le système d’éducation en langue française a augmenté de plus de 450 % au cours de la dernière décennie;

« Par conséquent, nous, soussignés, demandons à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario de fournir immédiatement le financement demandé par le rapport du groupe de travail sur la pénurie des enseignantes et des enseignants dans le système d’éducation en langue française de l’Ontario et de travailler avec des partenaires pour mettre pleinement en oeuvre les recommandations. »

J’appuie cette pétition, je la signe et je la donne au page Simon.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to thank the many residents of London and the surrounding area who signed a petition calling on the Legislative Assembly to pass the Safe Night Out Act.

“Whereas we are experiencing a sexual violence epidemic, with Statistics Canada reporting in 2021 that sexual assault was at its highest level in 25 years and community support organizations reporting more crisis calls than ever;

“Whereas 65% of women report experiencing unwanted sexual advances while socializing in a bar or restaurant, and incidents of sexual assaults involving drugs and alcohol most often occur immediately after leaving a licensed establishment or event; and

“Whereas there is no legal requirement for the people who hold liquor licences and permits, sell and serve liquor, or provide security at licensed establishments and events to be trained in recognizing and safely intervening in sexual harassment and violence;

“Whereas servers in licensed establishments also face high risk of sexual violence and harassment from co-workers and patrons;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately pass the Ontario NDP’s Safe Night Out Act to make Ontario’s bars and nightclubs safer for patrons and staff by requiring training in sexual violence and harassment prevention, by strengthening protections for servers from workplace sexual violence, and by requiring every establishment to develop and post a policy on how sexual violence and harassment will be handled, including accessing local resources and supports.”

I fully support this petition, affix my signature and send it to the table with page Duncan.

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ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING A BETTER ONTARIO ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR UN ONTARIO MEILLEUR (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Bethlenfalvy moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 180, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 180, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

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

L’hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président, et au membre aussi, pour votre français. C’était fantastique.

I’ll be sharing my time with the member from Mississauga–Malton and the member from Oakville, who is here.

Today, I’m pleased to lead off second reading debate for the Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2024, which I recently introduced in this House. This budget and these budget measures demonstrate how we are delivering on our plan to build. It describes how we are building a better Ontario.

Ce budget et ces mesures budgétaires démontrent que nous réalisons notre plan pour bâtir. Il démontre les actions que nous prenons pour bâtir un Ontario meilleur.

This budget comes at a time when Ontario, like the rest of the world, continues to face economic uncertainty due to high interest rates, global instability and global economic pressures. These are challenges that are putting

pressure on the province’s finances and putting pressure, as well, on families across Ontario.

Despite these pressures, we are continuing to deliver on our plan to build. It’s a plan that invests in infrastructure to get more homes built faster. It’s a plan to attract better jobs with bigger paycheques. And it’s a plan that keeps costs down for families and businesses, all while retaining a path to balance.

Madam Speaker, our government is taking a fiscally responsible approach by investing in Ontario’s economy without raising taxes, because we refuse to off-load the costs onto hard-working Ontario families and communities at a time where they’re counting on us to keep costs down. Make no mistake; they are counting on us in this House. As every member here understands, being counted on is a responsibility, a privilege and an honour.

This forward-looking document is a road map. It lays out the road ahead for public services and infrastructure as we continue to foster economic growth and job creation. It’s our vision for the future we want to see for our children and our grandchildren, and the future for all those who may one day come to call Ontario their home, much like my parents did many, many years ago.

With Ontario’s population expected to grow by millions in the coming years, we need a sound plan to meet the needs of our people, to have affordable homes and reliable highways, dependable municipal resources like water and playgrounds, good schools and a robust health care system—everything that one would need to live, to work, to do business and raise a family in Ontario.

This budget—and the actions contained in these measures being discussed today—maintains and improves upon our work to meet the demands of our growing population. It breaks new ground on the road towards our promising future, despite today’s high inflation, high interest rates and global economic uncertainty.

After all, there is no place in Canada or anywhere else in the world quite like Ontario, and no challenge is too large for us to overcome when we work together. There are likely few other jurisdictions anywhere else in the world seeing the kind of growth that Ontario is seeing today, and this growth signals that Ontario is seen as a place that is on the right course when it comes to our priorities.

Il n’existe pas beaucoup d’endroits ailleurs dans le monde qui connaissent l’ampleur de la croissance que vit l’Ontario aujourd’hui. Cette croissance indique que l’Ontario est considéré comme un endroit qui est sur la bonne voie en ce qui a trait à ses priorités.

That is why the budget is drafted with our priorities for the future in mind. This budget provides certainty to markets and, more importantly, confidence to the people of Ontario that the government is prepared for whatever lies ahead. While we don’t have a crystal ball and we don’t know what is going to happen tomorrow, we are confident that Ontario is ready for the challenges the world might throw our way.

Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, the 2024 budget and its measures are a road map, one that paints a clear picture

of how bright Ontario's future can be and how, despite a challenging economic situation, our government is rebuilding the economy by accelerating Ontario's plan to build, the most ambitious capital plan in the province's history. This investment of more than \$190 billion over the next 10 years to build and expand highways, transit, homes, high-speed Internet and other critical infrastructure is promoting our economic growth.

More often than not, fostering growth means supporting our municipalities. That is why we are also increasing funding for housing-enabling municipal infrastructure by investing \$1 billion in the new Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Madam Speaker, some audience participation is always a good thing.

This program is going to help municipalities right across Ontario. That's also why we're increasing funding for housing-enabling municipal infrastructure, through the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, to \$825 million for municipal water infrastructure projects that would get more homes built faster.

Speaking of homes, we're also addressing the housing supply crisis with the \$1.2-billion Building Faster Fund that rewards municipalities that meet or exceed their housing targets.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I'm curious how long those members can keep that up. We'll see. We'll keep trying.

For small, rural and northern communities that have not been assigned a housing target due to their unique needs and circumstances, our Building Faster Fund includes \$120 million in funding to support their efforts, as well.

Madam Speaker, our government is also addressing housing supply and affordability by extending authority to all single- and upper-tier municipalities to impose a municipal tax on vacant homes.

We are making these investments and changes because we know that the best way to get more homes built faster is by supporting our municipal partners. No one understands the needs of their communities better than those municipalities. We are choosing to empower local governments to make the best choice for themselves, and they have our full support.

Speaker, a key part of our budget is our focus on highways and other critical transportation infrastructure. That is why we are tackling gridlock and saving commuters time by advancing critical highway projects like the new Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. In addition, we're expanding existing in-demand highways, like Highway 401 and Highway 7, by supporting the construction of new interchanges at Banwell Road and E.C. Row Expressway in Windsor—

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: —and Highway 416 and Barnsdale Road in Ottawa.

There is a member from Ottawa here—there are a couple here, but they seem to be preoccupied.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm just checking to see who owns the land around there.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Perhaps the member opposite could take the high road.

1330

Madam Speaker, we're supporting Highway 416 and Barnsdale Road in Ottawa, and I'm sure the member opposite will come to appreciate that one day.

We're also improving roads and highways and bridges in communities right across Ontario.

We are witnessing the largest transit expansion anywhere in North America. It's happening right here in Ontario. And it doesn't stop there.

We are improving GO train and GO bus services, connecting light rail transit, advancing four priority subway projects in the GTA, and we're bringing back—I know my member from North Bay would really be happy—the Northlander to restore passenger rail service to northern Ontario.

We are investing \$1 billion to support all-season roads, high-speed Internet connectivity and community supports for the Ring of Fire region.

Our government isn't only building roads and transit. Our growing population needs more in order to thrive and secure our successful future. That is why we're continuing to build a robust health care system that puts people at the centre of care.

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I know. It brings a tear to my eye, too.

That's why our government is delivering on the most ambitious plan for hospital expansion in the province's history, with investments of nearly \$50 billion—yes, you heard correctly, \$50 billion—over the next 10 years in health infrastructure, including close to \$36 billion in capital grants.

Additionally, we are committing \$620 million over 10 years to allow health care system partners to address urgent infrastructure renewal needs and extend the life of hospital and community infrastructure. As well, we are investing \$50 million over three years to enhance and stabilize health care capacity within northern and rural communities and \$45 million over three years to enhance the Northern Health Travel Grant Program.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I almost got a clap out of my esteemed colleague across the aisle.

We are investing approximately \$94 million over three years to enhance the health and well-being of Indigenous and northern communities, with care tailored to community needs.

Interjections.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Almost. I'm working on it, Madam Speaker—but directionally, very positive.

Despite a challenging global economic situation, our government continues to invest in care, education and other vital public services.

That is why we've continued to invest \$6.4 billion since 2019 to build 58,000 new or upgraded long-term-care beds across the province by 2028. In addition, our government is investing \$155 million in 2024-25 to increase funding to fast-track construction of the next tranche of long-term-care homes by November 30, 2024.

I know this will be of particular interest to certain members in this House present: We continue building, expanding and renewing schools and child care spaces by investing \$23 billion over 10 years, including about \$16 billion in capital grants—

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Hear, hear.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I thought that might get the Minister of Education's attention—which includes \$1.4 billion for the current school year to support the repair and renewal of schools.

While on the topic of schools, I will add that we're getting students back to basics, with close to \$172 million for the 2024-25 school year for targeted math and reading supports, as well as an updated kindergarten curriculum starting in September 2025.

We're also supporting small, northern and rural colleges and northern universities by providing \$10 million in targeted supports.

Madam Speaker, our government knows that keeping active and having access to recreational opportunities is vital to any thriving community. That's why we are launching a new \$200-million Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Hear, hear.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: I thought you might like that, Ernie—to strengthen communities across Ontario by investing in new and upgraded sport, recreation and community facilities that will support the mental and physical health of families, youth and seniors for generations to come.

We remain committed to creating good-paying jobs and fostering business investments that will deliver tomorrow's economic success today.

To help attract investments and new jobs in key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, life sciences and technology, our 2024 budget allocates an additional \$100 million to the Invest Ontario Fund, for a total of \$600 million.

Speaking of manufacturing and technology, we're boosting the growth of Ontario's end-to-end supply chain for electric vehicles and batteries. I'm proud to say that over the last three years, we have attracted more than \$28 billion in automotive and EV-battery-related investments from global automotive manufacturers, parts suppliers and EV battery and materials manufacturers. These are investments that are expected to create more than 12,000 new, permanent jobs in addition to spurring economic growth. This will create jobs in all of Ontario. In fact, it will create jobs in Windsor. It will create jobs—

Interjection.

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy: Yes, I heard a clap from Windsor.

It will create jobs in Kitchener-Waterloo and southwestern Ontario, in the north—right across this great province. These are the jobs of the future—jobs that will support our workers and their families for decades to come.

On a related point, as noted in our budget, in 2024, we are enabling an estimated \$8 billion in cost savings and support for businesses, including \$3.7 billion for small businesses. This will also help create jobs and economic growth

With this budget, we are supporting Ontario's mining sector by investing an additional \$15 million over three years in the Critical Minerals Innovation Fund. This will enhance research and development as well as the commercialization of innovators.

To add more on economic development, we are increasing the Northern Energy Advantage Program to help eligible large industrial operators manage the electricity costs and create good jobs in northern Ontario. These increases total \$167 million in 2024-25 and \$206 million annually in 2025-26 and 2026-27.

Madam Speaker, our government has always stood alongside our workers. Just as the Premier has said before, I'd be willing to bet on Ontario workers over those from anywhere else in the world. We continue to work for workers in this House day in and day out. That is why we are investing an additional \$100 million, in 2024-25, in the Skills Development Fund Training Stream, and continue to implement the \$224-million Skills Development Fund Capital Stream. We support workers, and we continue to develop Ontario's world-class workforce, just as we are continuing to build on Ontario's skilled trades pipeline.

We are investing an additional \$16.5 million annually over the next three years through the skilled trades strategy to support a variety of programs that attract more young people into the skilled trades, some of whom are here today. This will help simplify the system and encourage employer participation in apprenticeships while continuing to provide more young people with meaningful, lifelong careers.

Madam Speaker, whether it is workers, patients, small businesses, drivers in gridlock or young families making ends meet—with this budget, our government remains on a path to build for the long term while keeping costs down. We are making investments now that will support our growing province well into the future. Our government is here to help this province overcome any challenge, invest responsibly and pave the way for our bright future.

And if you, too, believe that Ontario can continue being the best place in Canada and the world to go to school, get a job, build a life, buy a home and raise a family, then our government has a plan that will work for you.

Et si vous aussi croyez que l'Ontario peut continuer à être le meilleur endroit au Canada et au monde où étudier, avoir un emploi, bâtir sa vie, acheter un logement et élever une famille, alors, notre gouvernement a un plan qui est à l'oeuvre pour vous.

I urge all members of this Legislature to support these budget measures and join our government in building a

better Ontario. This is a plan for all 16 million Ontarians and for many more who want to come to Ontario, as they look to Ontario to lead the way not just in Canada, not just in North America, but the whole world today.

1340

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next, I'll recognize the member for Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: It's with great pleasure that I rise today and speak on the second reading of Bill 180, Building a Better Ontario Act, following the minister.

Thank you to the Minister of Finance for sharing his time with myself and the member from Mississauga–Malton, the new parliamentary assistant. It has been an honour to work with the minister and his team on the 2024 budget.

Speaker, I also want to take this opportunity to thank the previous parliamentary assistant, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, for all his valuable support in working on the budget.

Let me begin by saying I'm very confident in the Ontario government's vision for our economy. We are investing in vital public services and in infrastructure to get more homes built faster, to attract high-quality, high-paying jobs, and to keep costs down for families and businesses, all while retaining a path to balance and all during a period when Ontario, like the rest of the world, continues to face economic challenges and uncertainty.

I'd like to take a few minutes to expand on some of the economic proof points of the times we find ourselves in, as shown in the 2024 budget. As detailed there, high interest rates are expected to continue negatively impacting Ontario's economy in 2024.

The outlook for real GDP growth in 2024 has deteriorated significantly over the last year. The budget also shows that following estimated real GDP growth of 1.2% in 2023, growth is projected to be at 0.3% for 2024; this is down from 1.3% at the time of the 2023 budget and 0.5% at the time of the 2023 economic outlook and fiscal review. Real GDP growth is projected to then increase to 1.9% in 2025 and further rise 2.2% in 2026 and 2027. This also represents slower projected growth compared to the 2023 budget and the 2023 economic outlook and fiscal review. Bear in mind, for the purposes of prudent fiscal planning, the Ministry of Finance projections are slightly below the average of private sector forecasts.

Meanwhile, employment in the province is projected to rise by 0.8% in 2024, slowing from a 2.4% increase in 2023. A positive is that the unemployment rate over the outlook period is projected to remain below the recent historical average.

Geopolitical developments are key economic factors and continue to pose a significant risk to Ontario's economic outlook. For example, commodity markets and supply chains continue to be impacted by these global events.

A final key piece to this macroeconomic picture is that rising tensions are continuing to weigh on international trade and goods and services, which could impact Ontario's key trading relationships around the world and here

in North America. These geopolitical risks and possibilities are outside the power of provincial governments to influence, even if they may have ramifications on the provincial government.

For 2023–24, the government is projecting a deficit of approximately \$3 billion. As part of our path to balance, the government is projecting deficits of \$9.8 billion in 2024–25 and \$4.6 billion in 2025–26, before reaching a surplus of \$0.5 billion in 2026–27. So we do have a path to balance.

Speaker, to paraphrase the minister, we are not letting these things divert from our plan to build Ontario. Many of our 2024 budget initiatives are focused on health care. A marquee piece the minister revealed is how we are establishing the first medical school in Canada that is primarily focused on training family doctors right here in the GTA, at York University.

Just as we need more family doctors, we also need more nurses, which is why we are investing \$128 million over three years to support sustained enrolment increases of nursing spaces at publicly assisted colleges and universities by 2,000 registered nurse seats and 1,000 registered practical nurse seats.

We are helping more people access convenient health care by investing an additional \$965 million in hospital operating funding in 2024–25. This is a 4% increase in total base hospital operations for an unprecedented second year in a row.

We are connecting approximately 600,000 more people to primary health care through new and expanded inter-professional primary care teams with a total additional investment of \$546 million over three years, starting in 2024–25.

We are investing an additional \$2 billion in the home and community sector to support expansion and increase compensation for front-line workers, because strengthening and growing the health care workforce is critical to both our health care and our economy. That is why we are investing \$743 million over three years to help address immediate health care staffing needs and prepare for the future.

We are also adding more health care workers in underserved communities, with more than \$30 million in funding injected to date through the expanded Ontario Learn and Stay Grant program. The grant provides full, upfront funding for tuition, books and other educational costs. The grant is for students who enrol in an eligible nursing, paramedic or medical laboratory technologist program, in return for working in these communities where they studied for a term of service after graduation. The Ontario Learn and Stay Grant program demonstrates how committed we are to building a stronger, more resilient health care workforce in underserved communities in northern, eastern and southwestern Ontario.

Speaker, I want to share how we are building on the historic investment of \$3.8 billion over 10 years—this investment is for mental health and addictions services, as part of the Roadmap to Wellness: A Plan to Build Ontario's Mental Health and Addictions System strategy,

by investing \$396 million over three years. These funds will go to stabilizing, improving access and expanding existing mental health and addictions services and programs.

We know we need to support individuals facing unstable housing conditions and dealing with mental health and addictions challenges. This is the reason why we are investing an additional \$152 million over the next three years towards various supportive housing initiatives designed to support vulnerable people.

Speaker, rising costs have, no doubt, impacted household budgets, and there are no two ways about that.

The government continues to help Ontario's most vulnerable, including individuals living with mental health and addictions challenges who are experiencing unstable housing conditions, and low-income seniors.

We are ensuring that more seniors who need to get the help they need get it by expanding the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System, commonly known as GAINS, and indexing the GAINS benefit to inflation. This change is monumental and will provide financial support to approximately 100,000 additional low-income seniors.

This isn't the only way we are helping people who may be seeing great strains on their family budgets. For example, we are making electricity more affordable for thousands of additional, low-income families. We are increasing income eligibility thresholds for the Ontario Electricity Support Program up to 35% as of March 1, 2024.

We are helping to provide savings, daily, for riders on participating public transit systems through the One Fare program—savings that average \$1,600 per year. The program works by allowing transit riders to only pay once to transfer between GO Transit, the TTC and other participating transit systems in the GTA.

1350

Speaking of GO Transit, we are continuing to work to expand or improve GO Transit, in improving stations and other installations on the Kitchener GO line to enable two-way, all-day service. We are increasing train service between Union Station and the Niagara region, with more express service between Hamilton, Burlington and Toronto.

Our government is also helping drivers; make no mistake, Speaker. In addition to the proposed extending of the existing gasoline and fuel tax rate cuts until December 31, 2024, we are keeping costs down for drivers by proposing to ban any new tolls on new and existing provincial highways and freezing fees on drivers' licences and Ontario photo cards. These initiatives, when their savings are totalled, will save drivers an estimated \$66 million over the next five years.

I can add that in alignment with previous budget commitments, the government is moving forward with auto insurance reforms that would empower Ontario drivers with more affordable options, improved access to benefits, and create a more modern system. As noted in the 2024 budget, implementation of the proposed changes will be done in a way to help ensure that drivers are able to make informed decisions when choosing insurance coverage options that are available to them.

While we are speaking to the needs of Ontario car owners, let me add that we are fighting auto theft with a plan that includes \$49 million over three years to help police put auto thieves behind bars. As well, over three years, we are investing \$46 million to improve community safety in the greater Toronto area by supporting increased patrols and faster response times to major incidents and serious crimes. This is for the purchase of four police helicopters.

Community safety is absolutely essential. Having and using a reliable car and good mass transit systems are also essential in today's age.

Having a place to live is, of course, a priority in everybody's life. A priority of this government is fighting market speculation that may be contributing to people having challenges in finding a place to call home. That is why we are deterring foreign investors from speculating on the province's housing market by strengthening Ontario's non-resident speculation tax, the most comprehensive tax of its kind in Canada, with amendments to support compliance and improve fairness.

Education is also, of course, a priority of this government. That is why we are getting students back to basics with close to \$172 million for the 2024-25 school year for targeted math and reading supports. As well, an updated kindergarten curriculum is starting in September 2025.

I would be remiss if I didn't also spotlight a few initiatives related to children and families. For example, the government is increasing the investment in the Ontario Autism Program by \$120 million in 2024-25, which will double the increase provided in 2023-24.

We are also providing an additional \$13.5 million over three years, on top of existing investments of \$1.4 billion over four years, to enhance initiatives that support women, children, youth and others who are at increased risk of violence or exploitation, including an additional \$4.5 million over three years for the Victim Quick Response Program+, to increase access to necessities for victims of human trafficking and gender-based violence and their families, especially those in rural and northern communities.

To help young people access mental health services close to home, our government is investing \$8.3 million over three years to add five new youth wellness hubs, bringing the total to 32.

Since 2020, the province has established 22 youth wellness hubs which have helped connect over 43,000 youth and their families to mental health and wellness services, accounting for over 168,000 visits. Five more hubs are in the planning stages, set for Port Hope, Thunder Bay, Oxford county, Vaughan, and Brampton. A west Toronto location opened just last January.

Speaker, the Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2024, contains many initiatives that move our plan forward. Of course, it contains the gas and fuel tax I discussed a few moments ago. They include measures relating to the Building Ontario Fund, the taxation of computer animation and special effects productions in the

entertainment industry, the taxation of wine, and other measures that impact the pension plan landscape. The measures also propose minor legislative amendments to clarify or improve administrative effectiveness or enforcement or to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of various statutes administered by the Ontario Minister of Finance.

As I conclude my remarks today, let me just say that our government is proud of all it has accomplished, yet we know there remains much more work to be done. In the face of high interest rates and global economic uncertainty, our government is working very hard to keep costs down, to rebuild Ontario so that families, businesses and municipalities that all call Ontario home can prosper. We are on track to make sure Ontario is once again the economic engine of Canada. Most importantly, we will do this while we continue to be prudent and have a responsible approach and retain a path to a balanced budget.

I encourage all members to vote in favour of this bill, Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2024.

I'd now like to pass my time over to my colleague the member from Mississauga–Malton and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I recognize the member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: It is always a pleasure to rise in the House to talk about the important things the government is doing.

Speaker, the only thing certain in the life of an MPP is the uncertainty. Last week, when I had the opportunity to talk about the budget, I wasn't even sure that I was going to be doing the same thing today. Thanks to the Premier and thanks to the confidence of the minister, I am now in the Ministry of Finance. So all I would say is that uncertainty is the only certain thing that we have.

As I rise to speak on second reading, I want to acknowledge the hard work of the Minister of Finance, what he has done along with his two wonderful PAs, the MPP from Oakville and the MPP from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. I was with them on the committee as well, and I've seen the hard work they have put into this budget bill. So I want to acknowledge and thank both of them for their hard work.

I see my former Mississauga–Malton resident and now a councillor in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound; Monica is here, as well. It's good to see you here, Monica, as we talk about the 2024 budget.

The measures that are contained in this bill to deliver strength to the province of Ontario—we call it our plan to build.

Speaker, I would like to spend a few minutes to put the spotlight on notable initiatives contained in this budget, Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2024. These are important measures that each, in their own way, support and help move forward our work as a government.

We all know affordability is an issue. We all know about the federal carbon tax and the pressure it is putting on the people of Ontario. Thankfully, we have a

government that believes in the people of Ontario. We're standing shoulder to shoulder with the people of Ontario to support them in these crises.

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One of the most impactful decisions that our government has made which affects the day-to-day life of all Ontarians is the decision to reduce the gas price. We're introducing proposed legislation that, if passed, would extend existing the gasoline and fuel tax reduction until December 31, 2024. With this extension, we are continuing to keep costs down for families and businesses. As the members of this House are aware, the Ontario government temporarily reduced the gasoline tax by 5.7 cents per litre and the fuel tax by 5.3 cents per litre, for diesel, from July 1, 2022, and it was supposed to be finishing up on June 30, 2024. Thanks to this budget, with this newly announced extension, we will make sure that the rates remain at nine cents per litre until December 31, 2024, saving Ontario households \$320, on average, over the two and a half years since the tax rate cuts were first introduced.

As the minister said when this proposed extension was unveiled in Mississauga–Lakeshore, our government understands that high inflation and interest rates are hurting Ontario workers and their hard-earned paycheques, and we will be standing shoulder to shoulder with them, continuing to support Ontario families by reducing the cost of gas.

Another thing which I get amazed with is film production. I'm sure many of our colleagues know that we, as Hollywood North, produce close to \$3 billion in film production. And that film production is not just content, but it's an economic powerhouse; it brings in the revolutions. It gives residents the ability to showcase their talent. Under the leadership of Premier Ford, we support film production, and we're not just saying it, but we're doing things. For example, we are making sure the Ontario Computer Animation and Special Effects Tax Credit is simplified. The Ontario Computer Animation and Special Effects Tax Credit, or OCASE for short, is an 18% refundable tax credit available to companies that undertake computer animation and special effects activities on eligible film and television productions in Ontario.

Speaker, if you remember, when we were growing up, Bambi was the first animation movie that we watched—and I do know how much it affects and how much pleasure it gives to our youth and now, in fact, even adults. So this is what we're doing here again.

To be eligible for this tax credit, a film or television production must also be certified for either the Ontario Film and Television Tax Credit or the Ontario Production Services Tax Credit—something we call “tethering” to these other film and television tax credits. The budget measures bill proposes to remove this tethering requirement and seeks to replace it with new eligibility rules to ensure the credit continues to only support professional productions. In other words, we are making sure that we are delivering on the government's commitment to explore opportunities to reduce red tape, simplify tax credit

support for computer animation and special effects activities, so that we can see a lot more production, a lot more economic activities.

This budget is full of wonderful things to support the province and the people of the province; for example, supporting our workers.

Madam Speaker, I remember when my father retired, after all his hard work for over 35 years working in a government job. It gave him pleasure to do things which he wanted to do now that he had some time. On one side, he had time, but on the other side, he was worried about the cost of living, his expenses and the compensation. And he's not alone. After working hard, we want to make sure that we can continue to have a lifestyle that we have built over years.

This is the way our government is making sure we help those workers who helped us to build a greater, stronger Ontario.

We're making progress concerning Ontario's pension plan landscape. We're working to implement a permanent target-benefit framework. If you're a worker, if you're in the industry, please join our hands—help us to build this.

Following consultations over the past year, legislative amendments to the Pension Benefits Act are being proposed through the 2024 budget bill. These amendments would implement policy changes arising from the 2023 stakeholder consultations, as well as legislative house-keeping matters. We are currently preparing the regulations that would be necessary to implement the target-benefit framework which the government intends to come into effect on January 1, 2025.

Target-benefit pension plans will provide a monthly stream of income in retirement, with predictable contributions for employers. Implementation of a permanent target-benefit framework would pave the way for more employers to offer workplace pension plans, increasing the opportunities for workers to save for their retirement. This is yet another way we're working for our Ontario workers.

In 2023, as we know, employment in Ontario increased by 2.5%—increases in both full-time and part-time. Under the previous Liberal-NDP government, we saw 300,000 jobs going out of manufacturing. Since 2018, there are 700,000 more people working in the province of Ontario—helping, contributing and building Ontario.

Interjections.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Thank you to the member for Essex for that encouragement to the government for building a better, stronger Ontario—speaking of which, to the member for Essex, I want to talk about the Building Ontario Fund. We look at the revenue of Ontario going from \$150 billion to \$200-billion-plus. It's no coincidence; it is the policy put in place by this government—making sure and helping business to invest in Ontario.

I'll give you an example. I was talking to a pension fund—and he explained to me that they're investing \$60 billion for infrastructure projects in India. I happened to ask them, “Why don't you do it here, close to home, close to the heart, where we can invest that money into the

infrastructure here, build a stronger Ontario, stronger Canada, and bring more investments into Canada?” When we do this, the revenue is going to increase. When we increase the revenue, it gives us more opportunity to serve Ontarians, flow back into more services.

Thankfully, we have a solution now. The budget measures would establish Ontario's new infrastructure bank—the Building Ontario Fund—in a new, stand-alone statute. This fund is another step in our government's plan to build and attract top-quality investment to Ontario and fund infrastructure that would otherwise probably not get built.

The Ontario Infrastructure Bank was announced in the 2023 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review as an important tool to attract capital to help build essential infrastructure. The Building Ontario Fund continues to make progress in laying the foundation of future successes as it establishes a governance framework and builds out the organization, including recruitment of the chief executive officer. The fund is also exploring opportunities to support large-scale projects in the post-secondary student housing, long-term care, energy generation and municipal infrastructure sectors.

This gives an opportunity to all our colleagues. I call each one of us the champion of our riding. We've been elected by the people to represent their voice, but at the same time to help them build a better riding as well.

So I encourage all the members of this House to go back to your riding, talk to your stakeholders, identify those projects. Bring those projects, whether it is, for example, in Brampton South, building up another housing for Sheridan College, or maybe building up another residence in Kingston or maybe a long-term-care—as we're talking about all this progress.

We're talking about EV batteries—maybe building another EV plant. I was talking to another stakeholder in my region of Peel: Sony Electronics. They're building up EV chargers.

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To build all this infrastructure, we need money—the municipal infrastructure sector. For example, my councillor, Brad Butt, always talks about building a bridge that can connect Etobicoke with Mississauga. It will save a lot of time. It's not just saving time—it will make sure that the people of Ontario who are driving on that bridge have more time with their family and have better productivity. By doing so, we can encourage more investments coming into Ontario, building our revenue base as well.

So what is this doing? The fund is currently engaging with Canadian entities with long-term investment horizons and an Ontario-based post-secondary institution to help finance new student housing projects. This fund is also exploring opportunities with partners to finance major energy generation projects, including attracting investment to build new nuclear projects.

For example, we can build green hydrogen. We have trucks, and the trucks need DEF, diesel exhaust fluid. To make that diesel fluid, we need urea, and to make that urea,

right now we're using ammonia. Instead of using ammonia, we can use hydrogen, which is made by electrolysis through electricity. To do that, we need infrastructure. And that's exactly what this fund is going to do.

First announced in the 2023 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, the fund is an important tool to attract capital to help build essential infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, as the government moves forward with Ontario's plan to build, the fund will act as a tool to attract capital, to help meet the infrastructure needs of a growing Ontario and ensure that we are building the critical infrastructure necessary to support all Ontarians.

We all know that at the end of every paycheque, a small amount of money is deducted as a pension. All these pension funds collect that money and invest in projects so that they can increase the size of that pension and help the recipients of their pension fund at the time of their retirement. Rather than investing this pension fund across the globe, what if we created opportunities right here at home? We'd have double benefit. We could invest that money into the infrastructure. Our Ontarians would get the benefit. We'd get them more investment, and those pension funds would be able to increase their benefits to the pension fund holders by investing those funds. So it's a win-win situation. I hope all the members in this House will go back to their ridings, look at those projects and support us in these kinds of pension fund investments.

Madam Speaker, our goal very simple—simple but powerful. The government is working hard to build a better Ontario. That is what we're doing through this budget, with many examples of new and expanded initiatives to meet these objectives. And we're doing it all across province. We truly believe that when we make investments across each sector, each geographical location, and when we support Ontario, we build a better, stronger Ontario.

How are we doing it? I'll give you some examples. Let's start with \$94 million over three years to enhance the health and well-being of Indigenous and northern communities, with culturally responsive and safe care tailored to community needs—investing \$1.1 million in funding to Maamwesying North Shore Community Health Services, to support the Soo and surrounding First Nation communities; helping Indigenous workers in northern Ontario train for rewarding careers, with \$7.3 million through the Skills Development Fund.

These are not just numbers. These are the actions on the ground. We've seen, for far too long, the north was left behind by the previous government. That is why we're providing the investment needed to ensure it has the support it needs today.

Let's look at the southern region.

On the communications front, we are investing more than \$63 million in the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology project to bring high-speed Internet access to over 64,000 more homes, businesses and farms across southwestern Ontario.

As the member from Chatham-Kent is smiling and saying—it's not just the Internet; when you bring the fast

Internet, you bring the investment. When you see these investments made, the businesses come.

Our longest-serving member on this side, from Oxford, is nodding and saying, "Yes, these are the important investments we need to make now," so that we can utilize that fund which we just talked about, so that we can have these pension funds coming and making those investments, so that we can increase the revenue for Ontario, so that we can spend that money in doing more for the people of Ontario. So it's like a circular economy. We're making sure that we work hard, we make more money, we invest that money, we give more service. As people are happy, we bring more investment. When we bring more investment, we increase the revenue. Let's continue that cycle.

I'm very passionate about Mississauga–Malton, so I can't resist talking about the Hazel McCallion LRT line. A downtown loop would connect the city of Mississauga's Square One district, and the Main Street extension would bring the LRT into downtown Brampton.

Madam Speaker, I still remember the time when the Hazel McCallion line was named after Hazel McCallion. She was standing right next to me, and she said, "It sounds so weird. It looks so weird. The majority of these names were done when the person is gone. I'm actually naming my own line, in front of me"—but that goes to the hard work she had done; that goes to the supreme power that had been blessed to her.

To Hazel: I still remember that time, and I want to say thank you for all your hard work. And "Do Your Homework"—that mantra that you gave is the one which is helping us, as well.

I don't have much time left, and there's a lot more to cover, so I'm going to talk a little bit of eastern Ontario, as well—I don't want to say only about northern and then southern; when I meet the members from eastern Ontario at the time of AMO, they're going to say, "Oh, you guys didn't talk about us."

In eastern Ontario, we're planning new campsites in provincial parks. We are electrifying provincial park campsites, including at Sandbanks.

We are continuing our government's plan to build long-term-care homes across Ontario. We are opening new long-term-care homes in the region, including Woodland Villa, for example, in Long Sault. It opened in December 2023, with 17 new long-term-care beds and 111 upgraded long-term-care beds.

We're improving services and supports for people in eastern Ontario—such as, in Ottawa, maintaining supportive housing for Salus that includes relocating 79 displaced low-income tenants with mental health and/or addiction needs.

We're investing more in primary health care teams, including, in Kingston, more than \$4 million in funding that will help up to 10,000 people connect to team-based primary health care.

In Peterborough, for example, more than \$3 million in funding will allow the newly established Peterborough

Community Health Centre to connect up to 11,375 people to team-based primary care.

On the highway infrastructure front and the economic main cable that is Highway 401, we are replacing Highway 401's Hallecks Road bridge in Leeds and Grenville and widening the 401 easterly from Brock Road in Pickering, and replacing bridges in Port Hope.

These are some of the examples.

I highly encourage the people of Ontario to take a look at the budget book. It's pretty detailed. It gives you a lot of investments that our government is making, with your help, so that we can build a better, stronger Ontario. As the members of the government, we have been talking about it; we're not the only ones, though. We go out and we ask people how we're doing.

I'll start with a quote from the mayor of Burlington. She said, "We are thankful that the province is listening to municipalities and working with our mayors to address the issues we are facing in our communities...."

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The CEO of the Ontario Medical Association said, "Ontario's doctors welcome the health care investment in this budget. The OMA identified three urgent priorities in our Prescription for Ontario: Doctors' Solutions for Immediate Action and asked the government for action.... We look forward to working together with the government and our partners on continuing to build a system for today and the future."

The president and CEO of TRBOT, the Toronto Region Board of Trade, said this: "Following 20 years of massive population growth in the Toronto region, this 'building budget' is what the doctor ordered. We applaud the government's significant investment in critical transportation...."

These are quotes from people across our province.

To conclude, I would like to pick up the torch of a theme the minister said. Yes, like the rest of the world, Ontario continues to face economic uncertainty and pressure due to high interest rates and global instability. These pressures are being felt day to day by Ontario families, businesses and municipalities. Yet, in the face of these pressures, our government is going to continue to work hard and to build a stronger Ontario, the course this bill helps move forward.

That is why I'm very confident that not only the members of the government, but each and every member of this House will support building a stronger, better Ontario by supporting the Building a Better Ontario Act, 2024.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to questions.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: As we are debating the budget, we should be debating the priorities of the government for the province. I would have hoped to have seen tangible health care investment for folks in my neck of the woods.

Specifically, something missing from this budget was what would be about \$3 million—the cost of a planning grant to allow Lakeridge Health to begin the advanced planning and design work on a much-needed hospital in

the Durham region. An expert panel selected Whitby. The Premier said we'd be getting a planning grant soon.

So my question to the Minister of Finance, who happens to be the MPP for Pickering–Uxbridge: When will the minister let Lakeridge Health get that planning grant, get started with that grant to begin the design work and start the wheels turning for health care in the Durham region?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): To respond, the member for Oakville.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Planning grants for hospitals are critically important.

We are building hospitals across the province of Ontario. When we took power, when we were elected in 2018, the health care system in Ontario was in dismal shape. We had a shortage of nurses, doctors; closing of hospitals. Our focus is getting that rebuilt. And we lived through COVID, I might add, in between all that. But our focus is still resolute. We are here; we have shovels in the ground in the Niagara Health System, Scarborough Health Network, Ottawa Hospital, Cambridge Memorial and more. We will continue to stay focused on building health teams and the infrastructure that they need to be able to operate efficiently.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Mr. Brian Saunderson: My question is for the member from Oakville.

A big priority for this government is making sure that we get much-needed housing built across the province and the different types that we need. One of the impediments for that is infrastructure shortages.

I know in my riding of Simcoe–Grey there are a number of municipalities that have water and waste water issues that they've got to clear up so that they can grow in a planned and intentional way. I'm wondering if the member could tell us how this budget is going to help accommodate that.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Simcoe–Grey. Great question.

Infrastructure is critically important wherever you are in the province. Whether you're in downtown Toronto, in downtown Ottawa, in Collingwood, in Oakville, in Burlington, it's critically important.

Our government is committed to working with the municipalities to make sure they have the proper investments. In this budget, we've put through a billion dollars in the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program.

We're also quadrupling the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund, which I think will help a lot of municipalities that are in dire need of effective, cost-effective safe water and systems in their municipalities.

We'll continue to work with all municipalities across the province to ensure they have the infrastructure they need for the growing population.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

MPP Jamie West: My question is for the parliamentary assistant. One of the things I always look for in the budget is the four-laning of Highway 69 to Sudbury. It took till page 56 to find this phrase—here’s one sentence: “Continue to widen Highway 69 from two to four lanes, from Parry Sound to Sudbury.”

Interjection.

MPP Jamie West: That’s great. You can applaud, but nothing has happened on this highway since I got elected. Nothing happened in 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023. And this is the 2024 budget.

So are you doubling, tripling, quadrupling the amount of work you’ve done in the past? Zero times anything is zero. When are you going to get this done?

Mr. Stephen Crawford: This is a government that is more committed to northern Ontario. The previous government, I think, referred to it as a “no man’s land.” This is a government that has been committed to focus investment in northern Ontario. Whether it be bringing back the Northlander, which is going to bring rail transportation back to remote communities in the north; whether it’s investing in critical minerals, which we need to develop, and which is going to create prosperity for Indigenous and northern communities; or an extension and an expansion of the northern Ontario travel grant, this is a government that is committed to the people of northern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, this budget—and you’ve been listening carefully, I know, this afternoon—reflects the government’s commitment to housing, health care, infrastructure and economic development. I’d like the member from Oakville to talk about the effects of the budget in those particular areas, please.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the great member from Whitby. What a great question: How is this budget going to affect the people? That’s ultimately what we’re here for—we’re here for the people of Ontario.

In terms of my community, specifically, in Oakville—I could talk for hours on this, but I’ll focus on one or two issues of how this budget is helping people.

This budget is helping commuters. My town is a major community that has commuters going to downtown Toronto on a daily or regular basis. Many of them take Oakville Transit and then transfer to the GO station. Well, now, one tap, one pay—\$1,600 a year. That is an incredible savings. And that’s after-tax dollars that people are saving. That is enormously going to help them.

Also, the gas tax cut that we’re putting through and proposing to extend to December 31 is going to save all those commuters who are driving in Oakville.

This budget is focused on helping affordability throughout the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: It’s always an honour to rise in this chamber and bring the voices of the residents of St. Catharines.

Speaker, at a time when rich, well-connected people in Ontario are benefiting from this government and working families like Nina and her husband struggle, how can this government defend a budget that fails to address the soaring cost of living; a budget that is failing their duty to build affordable housing, which even our federal counterparts are pointing out that Ontario, with this Conservative government somewhat at the helm—and a helm which seems to be a sinking ship, may I add—a government that is desperately failing the duty to build affordable housing, which is affecting real people in communities across St. Catharines and Niagara?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to start by saying thank you to the member opposite for talking about affordability, something this government takes very, very seriously.

This is a government—all the members strongly stood up in this House and talked again and again about scrapping the carbon tax. We talked about reducing the cost of gas. The member from Oak Ridges talked about the One Fare program that will help and make sure that commuters can save \$1,600.

We are continuing with our previous decision to expand the LIFT, the low-income workers tax credit, to provide more relief to low-income Ontario workers, and of course, reducing the gas reduction, which I spoke about—\$320 in savings.

Madam Speaker, I truly believe this is a government that believes and understands that affordability is an issue. We are here to support our residents of Ontario, and we’ll make sure we’ll continue to build those measures to help Ontarians.

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The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’ll go to the next question.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank both parliamentary assistants and the minister for their remarks today.

I know one thing that we’re used to in Windsor-Essex is announcements followed by no follow-through—Highway 3 was one, named Bruce Crozier’s Way in honour of the late MPP for Essex, but then 10 years of inaction.

One of the great announcements that was part of this budget was the E.C. Row Expressway/Banwell Road interchange—\$50 million. This is transformative for my community—both my municipalities.

I want to find out from the parliamentary assistant what the benefits are of investments in infrastructure, in terms of employment, in terms of commute times, getting people home to their families and helping the people of Ontario.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: Thank you to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

You raise a good point about what kind of return you get on infrastructure. The previous Liberal government spent a lot of money, as we all know; I don’t think we saw much for that. We didn’t see efficient transit. We didn’t see schools being built; in fact, they were being closed—over 600, I believe, in the province at that time. Hospitals were in dire shape.

Investing in infrastructure is a long-term payoff. It helps people on a personal level when you have the hospitals and the facilities to be able to support them through their difficult times. It's also an investment.

As you've mentioned, the roads that we are building and widening in the Windsor–Tecumseh area—that's a critical border point, and having trucks be able to move more efficiently across the border will get goods to their market quicker, more efficiently and safely. It will also help families who are commuting and driving their kids to soccer practice or going back and forth to school or work. It's going to let them get there safely. So it has a dual effect of being positive from a financial point of view but also on a personal and a family issue, as well.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think it's so symbolic that I get to start my one-hour lead on this particular budget for 2024 just as a solar eclipse will be hitting southwestern Ontario.

Interjection: Dark times.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Dark times, yes.

Bill 180 obviously will have an impact on the people of this province.

I'm listening to the government members as they talk about the highways and the infrastructure; they leave out people a lot.

You can talk about opening a bed, but you certainly can't open that bed without a nurse or without a health care worker.

So complicated is this relationship now between the people who serve the public and the Ford government that they're actually moving further and further apart.

If you really want to build a strong province that's inclusive, that's reaching its potential, that's meeting its climate change targets and that's actually building on the spirit of the people of this province, you have to talk about people. And those people are still feeling the impacts of your unconstitutional piece of legislation, Bill 124. In fact, I would say that this province is going to be feeling the negative impacts of that wage theft—really, wage theft, and also wage control—in Bill 124.

It has been quite a day. I just want to start off by saying it was really powerful this morning—I was really pleased to welcome the Roth family to Queen's Park. It has been emotional, because we all care so deeply about mental health. It's one thing to care about an issue, but that caring and that compassion need to also translate into direct investments, into resources. As I've said many times in this House, when people have the courage to come forward and to ask for help, the system has to be there for them. We've done a lot of work on the stigma around mental health and mental illness, and so now people do feel like they can actually talk about their feelings, whether they're farmers or construction workers or young people like Kaitlyn Roth. And those resources need to be there.

I want to thank the minister responsible for mental health. He did meet with the family after today's question period. This is the third time we've met with that minister. I will tell you, as the Waterloo rep, the MPP, and also the

finance and Treasury Board critic, I want that minister to have access to the funding that the government is promising, I want that funding to flow, and I want it to be a smart investment.

That's why we're so committed to the alternative destination for those who are suffering from mental health issues and a crisis. The emergency room is not the best place. From a basic, common sense perspective, I would hope that we could all agree that if you are in crisis, going to the emergency room and waiting 18 hours, with police there, with people in pain, with people in crisis—it's not the best place. Let's work together on this and redirect people to these alternative destination clinics, where people are trained, where they're going to be met with compassion, where there's going to be some empathy, where there are going to be some special strategies so that people feel supported—like Kaitlyn. When people fall through those cracks, we lose our potential as a province. I think that's probably one of the most painful things about suicide. Kaitlyn was so talented and so smart. She wanted to work with special-needs children. Lord knows, we have a wait-list of 60,000 people who are on the autism spectrum who need that resource and need that compassion.

So I want to thank the members who were supportive this morning, and I want to thank the Roth family.

I also want to say a special happy birthday to my daughter. She's 23 today. She's navigating the world of retail. She's a business leader with an American company here in Canada. And let me tell you, it's not the best place to land as a young worker, but she's learning some good lessons, and I'm very proud of her.

As I mentioned, the eclipse is set to happen very soon. I hope that everybody is being safe with regard to that. I want to thank the Perimeter Institute in Waterloo for sending me some guidelines and sending me some fancy glasses that you literally cannot see anything out of, which I think is the idea. We're lucky to have the Perimeter Institute in Waterloo region as an anchor company that is doing some amazing work.

I do want to say, as we talk about this budget—and some members have heard me talk about this. Budgets really are moral documents. They really, truly tell the story of the priorities of the government of the day. They tell the story of where the money is going and/or where the money is not going. There are a lot of places, with this particular government, where the money is not going, where it needs to be going, which would actually save the province money down the line, and I'll get to that in a second.

The need for government transparency is akin to the darkness before a solar eclipse, so you're going to see how I'm going to tie this all together. What we have here in Ontario is a solar eclipse of common sense. And when I say common sense, there are good places to—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: A total eclipse of common sense, yes.

If I start singing Bonnie Tyler, we're all in trouble here—which will not happen. A total eclipse of the sun. The hair in those days was really special.

The need for government transparency is akin to the darkness before a solar eclipse, highlighting the importance of shedding light on the government's actions, for public scrutiny.

Boy, I've never seen a government that is so resistant to sharing what's actually happening in Ontario—aside from the commercials that we're all paying for that tell us this fairy tale where people can afford housing, where people can find jobs, where people can find a doctor, or ensure that you can go and get the appropriate mental health resources that you need.

This decline in transparency, particularly with this government, based on what I'm hearing from people in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, is a loss of trust. That loss of trust really started right from 2018, when the government who said, "We're never going to interfere with municipal governments," cut city council in half—during an election, at midnight, no less.

This was a government that said, "We're tough on law and order," and yet, we have a justice system that is failing to meet the needs of both victims and the accused, I would say, where a record number of court cases have been stayed. I'm particularly concerned about those sexual assault cases.

Last week, our critic to the Attorney General hosted a press conference here and had two victims of sexual assault come to this place and talk about how they were denied justice in Ontario.

When you deny justice, it's really hard to be talking about being tough on crime, as this government likes to espouse.

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And so, just as the solar eclipse reveals the hidden layers of the sun, this budget reveals that the government is failing to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in Ontario. I believe that to be true. I believe that when I tell people in Waterloo and demonstrate how this government is failing so—I would say they're overachieving on the failing perspective. The people in Waterloo hear it. They see it. They feel it. They're experiencing it. And I'm going to talk about some of those people.

Just as a little joke—how does the man in the moon cut his hair? Some people say, "How?" Eclipse it; they eclipse it—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know it's bad. It's bad, and it's in history now.

I see my colleague from Kitchener-Conestoga is getting ready for the total eclipse of the sun—and hopefully he doesn't break out into song.

Mr. Mike Harris: Total eclipse of the sun.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a good song; please don't sing it.

There are a couple of areas that I really want to highlight, just to pull us all back.

There is a tendency of this government to side on behalf of the private sector, which is ironic, because as parliamentarians we take an oath to serve the public with integrity and we put the public first.

One of the issues that has really resonated—and this kind of reminds me of back when the former Liberal Premier was saying, "We're never going to sell off parts of hydro," but then they did. Then, the hydro costs continue to go up because of the cost escalation.

My friend and colleague from Toronto-Danforth, who is our energy critic, has been following what has been happening with Enbridge and the decisions that this government is making on the energy file.

It would surprise most people in the province of Ontario to learn that the government is subsidizing energy costs to the tune of \$7.8 billion. It's steadily going up. It's across the board. Everybody gets the subsidy. If you are a super rich person or if you're a super poor person, you are getting the same energy subsidy. I'm pretty sure Galen Weston can pay his own energy bills. The government has never considered even a sliding scale to address true affordability measures.

What they are doing—and I'm just going to read directly from one of the op-eds that my colleague wrote—is that they're busy breaking their own promise on energy and housing affordability. In the latest twist, this government "plans to pass legislation in February"—which is now before the House, before the committee, even today—"that will raise energy bills across the province and make life more expensive for new homebuyers." Does this sound like a common sense thing to be doing in a cost-of-living crisis? Of course, it does not. Two of the highest drivers, really, for people in Ontario are the cost of housing, and then, of course, the day-to-day costs, like groceries, and I'm going to talk about that.

So this government is reversing an excellent decision by Ontario's independent energy regulator, and I talked about this on the budget motion, because it defies all sense. Why would you not listen to the independent energy regulator when they're saying this is in the best interests of the province of Ontario, which you should be interested in as well? It all goes back to a subsidy that most gas customers do not even know that they're funding.

Right now, your gas bill is funding a huge subsidy worth hundreds of millions of dollars each year to cover the cost of expanding gas pipelines into new developments. Most people in Ontario don't know this. On December 21, the Ontario independent energy regulator decided to put a stop to the subsidy because it raises energy bills for existing customers and new homebuyers, while also increasing financial risk for the whole gas system. In fact, the independent regulator highlighted stranded assets—because we're building an energy sector in a way that they used to in the 1950s, not in 2024.

Ending the subsidy would save gas customers over \$1 billion over four years in avoided pipeline subsidy costs, which comes to almost \$300 per customer, plus interest profit payments paid by customers to Enbridge Gas on those amounts. Is this what the government is doing? No, they're not doing that. They're not going to try to save you \$300 a year.

"Ending the subsidy will also encourage developers to install heat pumps"—which we heard at pre-budget

committee would actually speed up housing starts. Is this government having great difficulty meeting your own housing start targets? Yes, you are. Do you need some help? You definitely need some help—“in new homes, which provide much cheaper heating and cooling, instead of gas,” for new homebuyers. So not only would these heat pump installations actually fast-track housing starts, which is a good thing; it would also provide cheaper heating and cooling for new homebuyers. Is this an affordability issue? Of course, it’s an affordability issue.

“Ending the subsidy would be a win-win-win-win,” said my friend and colleague from Toronto–Danforth. It would lower energy bills for existing customers. It would lower energy bills for new homebuyers. It would lower carbon emissions, and avoid even more cost down the road to convert away from fossil fuel heating in the houses built with heat pumps from the start.

This is a good plan that the independent regulator came forward with for Ontario.

There is, however, one loser in this whole issue, and that is Enbridge Gas. It would lose millions of dollars in profits, and shareholders might not make as much money as they wanted to. But Ontarians would save money. Who are we elected to serve? Ontarians, right?

So here we are. Enbridge Gas is right here. They were here this morning. They’re lobbying hard against the decision and have launched two challenges, so this government is going to be back in court, I guess. Its court challenge boldly complains that the decision will mean that, “Enbridge Gas has no right or ability to invest and earn a return on capital for new customer connections.” In other words, it will reduce their profits. So they are a company that is fighting for their profits.

I ask you, who is fighting to keep costs down for Ontarians? Not this government, because they have clearly sided with Enbridge Gas. In fact, the minister, MPP Smith, has announced that they will pass legislation to overturn this decision. The Ontario government seems to have been convinced that the change will reduce housing supply and affordability, but developers can just forgo gas and install heat pumps instead for little or no additional cost and sometimes even a savings. This could actually be good for developers as well, if developers are dedicated to actually building housing. But the question remains: Why should every other gas customer in Ontario be forced to pay to subsidize them to install this fossil fuel infrastructure and then be forced to pay Enbridge profits on top of that? Is this a fair situation for Ontario voters, for Ontario citizens? Absolutely not. Is the government truly showing their hand by siding with Enbridge? Absolutely.

This is what we also know—you can’t really get a clear answer from the government on this, but this is where we are right now: Gas is no longer the cheapest heating source. Investing in gas pipelines for heating is financially foolish because they will become obsolete as we decarbonize buildings. It is 2024; we should be talking about this. The government’s own expert electrification panel noted “growing indications that it is unlikely that the natural gas grid can be decarbonized and continue to deliver cost-effective building heat.”

Our neighbours—we hear a lot from the Premier about Texas, which always makes me want to break out into a Beyoncé song—like New York state and Montreal are prohibiting gas in new construction. I want to re-emphasize that: New York state is prohibiting gas in new construction.

Passing legislation to reinstate a subsidy is completely out of step and risks financial disaster down the road.

The Minister of Energy has clearly shown that he is on the side of Enbridge and not on the side of Ontarians who will face higher gas bills, instead of providing an opportunity of \$300 in savings. Unfortunately, there are obviously major misconceptions about the broader issues, in part due to a great deal of misinformation. Right now, this is happening in committee, where this debate is happening.

Enbridge is fighting for their profits. We need the government to fight for the people, to keep those costs down.

We definitely think that the Ontario Energy Board made the right decision, based on evidence, to lower your energy bills. And we’re going to continue to raise these issues in this House.

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What a perfect example, though, to clearly demonstrate who this government is working for.

We’ve seen some other escalations, if you will, in other ministries—particularly on health care. My God, we cannot afford to privatize health care any further. We’ve got to hold the line and we’ve got to walk it back; there’s no doubt about it. When this government spent \$1 billion last year on agency nurses instead of hiring nurses in our acute-care and community care centres—this is not only fiscally irresponsible, but it is actually failing to meet the needs of communities.

I’ve talked about my future daughter-in-law. She’s a nurse—excellent, top of her class—working in the NICU, working with those little babies. Grand River Hospital is not hiring nurses. How can it be?

Clearly, choices are being made here around where the money is going to be spent or where the money is not going to be spent, but it certainly isn’t being invested in our health care human resources crisis.

The minister can talk about all the numbers she wants. Three emergency rooms were closed this weekend in southwestern Ontario. If you’re in a community and you need to go to the emergency room, you need that emergency room to be open. Surely we can agree on this. But in order for that emergency room to be open, you need to have nurses and medical professionals there.

What we have seen in Ontario is a mass migration of these very talented people, some of whom studied here, some of whom received support to study here, some of whom are very invested in medical research and the life sciences file. They’re leaving Ontario because Ontario is such a hostile place right now, in the health care sector.

When you talk to people who are in the health care system and they have an agency nurse working right alongside them and they can’t get a full-time job, but this

nurse beside them is making twice or three times as much money—can you imagine what that does to morale? It is counterproductive. It's counterintuitive. It's fiscally irresponsible. I said this to the Minister of Finance—that we cannot afford \$1 billion in agency nurses.

Let's invest in human health resources in this province. Let's demonstrate that we're committed to retaining these people in the system, but also recruiting into the system. In order for that to be successful, the system can't be broken; the system has to be a healthy place. That's how you recruit back into the health care system.

These are very conscious, very committed decisions that the government is making. They refuse to close the loopholes on these private health care agencies that see the market here in Ontario because 2.3 million Ontarians don't have a doctor. They see the loophole. The government sees the loophole. And now they're charging anywhere between \$450 a year to have access to a doctor, all the way up to \$4,900.

In the public session in the public accounts earlier today, our health critic brought forward a motion and she said, "Let's have the auditor look into this. Let's follow the money."

These agencies, let's also remember, are being subsidized by OHIP, as well. So the taxpayers are funding the profit margins in these health care agencies. This is happening in Ontario. In fact, these health care agencies are popping up just as much as cannabis store clusters—Waterloo has about nine in a three-block radius; I don't know what's going on, exactly, with that. These businesses see a market share here in Ontario that has been intentionally created by this government.

When you purposefully create a crisis by not funding health care, you are, in turn, creating a whole new market share for for-profit health care. So that is happening.

In fact, we even have for-profit plasma centres opening up in one of the poorest areas in Hamilton. A European company has said, "Do you know what? They've done such a terrible job of promoting and supporting blood services in Ontario and in Canada that we're going to go there and we're going to offer to pay for plasma and pay for blood in the poorest neighbourhood, where people are the most desperate." They're the most desperate. They're looking for some revenue because they're poor. They're easily—the argument can be made to them that they're doing something good, but this is the new culture of Ontario, where we'll buy anything. Anything is for sale in Ontario, and it's quite a development, I have to say.

The other thing is, here you have a government defending Enbridge and trying to hold their profit margins at a certain level through legislation, which even undermines the government's own initiatives. And then Enbridge goes and cuts off rebates, leaving some homeowners on the hook for thousands in green renovation costs. This is bold. This is so bold, I would have to say, that Enbridge has said, "Do you know what? We're not going to honour those rebates."

This was just in the paper last week—that "most Ontarians' carbon footprint is dominated by natural gas

heating." One lady decided to swap out her furnace for a heat pump. She applied for the government rebates. "Knowing there were \$10,000 in government rebates available from the federal government and Enbridge Gas"—this was a partnership; it was a collaboration—they "went further with their renovation" to reduce their carbon footprint. They changed out their furnace for a heat pump; they upgraded some windows. And then what did Enbridge do? "We applied and we got confirmation to go ahead"—great, but then, when things were done and they had made commitments to contractors and thus, Enbridge said, "No, we're not going to honour that commitment."

So is this the new normal, where the government is not even protecting consumers on policies and programs that the government has negotiated?

One homeowner said, "This is a significant upfront cost to the homeowner. We're not talking hundreds of dollars here"—we're talking thousands. "Times are tough. Inflation is insane. Everyone's mortgage is up for renewal and they've just put thousands of Ontarians in a really tough position to be able to manage these costs that they were not anticipating."

So the energy minister is defending Enbridge, and then Enbridge is saying to people that they have agreed to have a contract around reducing their gas costs, that they're not going to honour that commitment anymore. But who is the Minister of Energy going to bat for? He's going to bat for Enbridge. You can't even make it up.

This is an ongoing issue for Ontarians, who really feel abandoned by the government. The government is making very poor choices on the energy file, which is a huge cost to the province of Ontario. This speaks to priorities—and I feel like it's getting darker. I think that it's actually happening, and it does feel very symbolic to me, I have to tell you.

I'm going to talk a little bit about—and this is along the same theme of how the government is making decisions. We have all agreed in this House now, for years, that at 319 acres a day—the fact that we are losing these acres every single day in Ontario is not sustainable, nor is it a practice that any government should be endorsing or condoning.

1500

In Wilmot township, farmers in that township just outside of Waterloo—not in my riding—in January, were approached by some developers who heard that 770 acres of prime agricultural land would be rezoned. It wasn't in the official plan. If this sounds familiar—I'm already calling it greenbelt 2.0. The fact of the matter is that these farmers knew that they weren't part of the official plan for development. The region has traditionally had a very balanced and positive relationship with farmers. We are an agricultural community. We believe that farmers feed cities. The citizens love the fact that we had a countryside line around the region which would focus our attention on building up, building smart, investing in the needed infrastructure, but not being wasteful with sprawl—more and more and more sprawl. So when this government rolled back their Bill 23 and the urban boundaries, and

said, “Do you know what? We’re really, really sorry”—I just want to tell you, Madam Speaker, they weren’t that sorry, because they’re still carving out parcels of land and they’re making it available, bypassing the provincial environmental strategy, bypassing municipal plans, quite honestly. So this government has been very complicit and a willing participant, even though they were very sorry. They were sorry about the \$8.3 billion in land acquisitions that some developers were going to benefit from. And we also know that this was never really about housing; right?

In Waterloo region now, we have farmers who are being forced off their land. They received lowball offers, somewhere around \$35,000 per acre. But as soon as that one acre turns into an industrial proposition, it goes to \$1 million? This is exactly what happened in the greenbelt—someone told someone who happens to be a developer that this land was now going to be industrial land, so it’s for economic development.

We also strongly believe that rural communities can be a strong partner in economic development, but, boy, it shouldn’t come at the cost of 770 acres of some of the best farmland in Ontario. These six farmers on this 770 acres—one of those families has been there since 1861. Out of nowhere, not part of any official plan, not part of any public consultation—no transparency whatsoever—farmers got a fellow, a third party from the States to come to them and say, “I’ll give you \$35,000 for each acre, or you’re going to be expropriated by the region.”

Imagine being a contributor to the very fabric of our country and of our province and of our community, the very people we all espouse to say we respect and honour—this time-honoured tradition and profession of being stewards of the land and feeders of the city, and it’s \$35,000 or you’re off, you’re expropriated. Forget that these are also six really productive family businesses.

Farming is a hard life; we can agree on this. There are not too many farmers in here, although I have worked with a couple over the years. They have to be tough, because it’s a tough profession.

The region has looked at the Get It Done piece of legislation, and schedule 1, which eases the onerous red tape—I guess, if you will, or blue tape—of expropriating land without an environmental assessment that meets the needs of the conservation authorities. They usually are consulted. Of course, the conservation authorities in Ontario have really been cut off at the knees, if you will. They’re not even consulted on key environmental decisions that are happening. Nobody even asked them, “What about the flood plain? What about the aquifer?”

I just want to say at the very top of this that economic development does not have to come at the cost of prime agricultural farmland. This is a false choice, and it’s a choice that this government doesn’t want to even talk about. Most of regional council have signed nondisclosure agreements, so these farmers don’t even have anybody to ask a question like, “What’s going to be developed on there? How thorough was the environmental assessment?”

While this 770 acres is not directly over the aquifer, it’s 200 metres away from it. And I don’t know if you know

this, Madam Speaker, but water doesn’t just go down; water moves. We know this.

We have the knowledge, we have the power to make the right decisions, and yet this government brings forward legislation that is so open to the overriding of basic rights.

I’ve said this: Something is fundamentally unjust about what’s happening to farmers in Wilmot right now. I don’t know how you would feel if someone came to your farm and said, “Do you know what? An undisclosed industrial project is needed, and therefore you must leave your land.” It would be cartoonish if it wasn’t so very serious—because 80% of the drinking water that Waterloo region accesses is from the moraine; it is from the ground. So we are very protective of our source water protection; we have to be. We cannot afford to have a pipeline to Lake Erie or Lake Huron. Nobody wants that. The smart investment is to ensure that we become true stewards of the land.

In 2024, the fact that this government is so complicit in the paving of 770 acres of prime farmland, knowing the history of what has happened around water in the PC Party is astounding to me. It is so—it’s not even the 1950s; it’s like the 1850s here. Do you know what I mean?

I’ve written to the Premier. I know the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has asked the province to intervene, to pause and take a sober second thought, because once this land is gone, it is gone forever.

No consultation; no transparency; strong-arming farmers; no environmental assessment that we can see, that we can build some confidence in; and also a lack of process. Like, where else could this rumoured electric vehicle battery plant go? Do you know what I know for sure? You can’t eat an electric vehicle battery.

We definitely need to be focused on food security. If we’ve learned anything from the pandemic and having to be dependent on other jurisdictions, we need to be self-sufficient as a province. We need people to understand that the province is supportive of farming and of farms. We need new generations to look at that profession and that trade with some confidence that this is going to be something that the province of Ontario actually supports. We’re moving in the opposite direction—and it is getting darker, just on cue, for sure.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: And there’s a siren too.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Is there a siren?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Yes, there is.

Ms. Catherine Fife: In all of these communities really feeling that these backroom deals are driving democracy, or seeing a real reduction in democratic renewal in Ontario, which undermines trust in all of us—I hope people can see that.

The Premier, though, has really taken a very principled stand on a very important issue. When you go to the LCBO tomorrow, you’ll be able to get a brown paper bag. This is where his focus has been. He has asked the LCBO to reverse the fact that they weren’t giving you brown paper bags. This is—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: For the love of humanity. Of all the issues that Ontarians are facing, of all of the challenges

around affordability, around the high cost of groceries, around not having rent control anymore, around renovations and demovictions—in all of that, the number one priority for this Premier is to make sure that when you buy a quart of rum, you'll get a paper bag to go with it.

When I tell people and sometimes show people what's actually happening in this place, honestly, it doesn't instill a lot of confidence.

Never fear, though; we've got some really good commercials—and it's all happening here. You're footing the bill for it, Ontarians.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Fantasy island.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Fantasy island.

I'm sure when you are one of the people who is waiting an average of 12 hours in an emergency room and that TV up in the corner is just on replay and you see this commercial where people are buying their first house or even moving into a rental place or—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: LCBO paper bags.

Ms. Catherine Fife:—going to the LCBO and walking out very happily and satisfied, with a brown paper bag.

I don't know what is actually going on over there around priorities, but this province has never spent so much money and given so little to the people of Ontario.

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The cost of where you are, the cost of these poor decisions on the people of this province—particular y in education, I want to say, just for a second—is having a huge impact. Our critic on the post-secondary education file, this morning, asked a really excellent question of the Premier because his comments last week, when they were opening another medical school, were—sure, this is great. We do have qualified people in Ontario that have come from other countries that can't be working in the medical field.

I'm thinking of the head of security at my building here in Ontario; his name is Mohammed. He's a renal specialist from Pakistan. When I first met him—six years ago now—that's exactly when the government froze the minimum wage. We calculated how much he lost by that freezing of the minimum wage: \$7,000. He has five children and he's a doctor, okay? He's a doctor working as a security officer, and he wants to go back to medical. He wants to get his qualifications here in Ontario.

Do you know how hard it is in Ontario if you're a foreign-trained medical professional to access your potential? Is this a place where the government is focusing some energy and some resources and some funding? Of course not, no, but a shiny new medical school with a ribbon cutting is going to be great.

But at that ribbon cutting, the Premier had some very strong words when he was mentioning international students that are training. I can't remember the exact quote, but he was like, "I just want kids from Ontario to go to these schools."

It's important to remember that all of us are immigrants in Ontario, except with First Nations Indigenous people—and cue my colleague from Kiiwetinoong walking by as I

say that. They're the first peoples; the rest of us are immigrants.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Settlers.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Immigrants and settlers, yes. And yet the Premier can stand in his place and start talking about these international students that are taking up these spaces.

Let's be really clear and back the bus up a little bit here, because the reason that post-secondary institutions, colleges, moved to accelerate and commercialize international students is because the public system was so fundamentally underfunded, to the point of crisis. It started under the Liberals, and it continued and accelerated with this government.

Even your own blue ribbon panel had said, "Listen, you have to come to the table with operating funding." Even when the Minister of Finance met with the editorial board of the Toronto Star, they said, "Listen, this is not sustainable. Your \$1.3 billion that you're going to put back into the system—that you've already taken out—is not going to cut it."

So, post-secondary institutions started to look towards international students to generate revenue. This is a fact. It's well-documented. It's actually in your own blue ribbon report. So, to hear the Premier use this kind of language—and, listen, I know that the media show up every time, because you just really never know what's going to be said by this Premier.

This morning, when the member from Oshawa asked a very legitimate question about the planning grant for the Whitby hospital, what she got back was just complete broken-telephone, grade 6 excuses. It's so irresponsible, and I don't know if it's a personal thing, because sometimes get pretty personal with this Premier, but the fact that, if you want to be responsible and you know that the population is growing and you know that the population is aging and that, from a demographic perspective, we are going to have to have the resources and the people to take care of future generations, then the planning grant is really just a common sense first step, right?

Waterloo region received \$25 million, I think, in the last budget. We're going through the process of site location. It's not going to be on 770 acres of farmland, I've been told. And we're doing our due diligence. You want communities to do their due diligence, right? It's the responsible thing to do, but is that happening? Did we get an answer from the Premier this morning to a very basic, common sense question around planning for future health care needs? No, we did not. We got some name calling, we got some generalizations, and I have to say it was—sometimes it's just dumbfounding for me.

One of the other issues, as it relates to international students, Madam Speaker, which is really rearing its head in places like Kitchener-Waterloo because we have Laurier, we have University of Waterloo, we have Conestoga College, is that folks who are coming to Ontario—maybe sometimes they're doing a PhD, they're here and they're doing their research and they have

spouses, they have partners, and those partners sometimes are pregnant. But what we're seeing is that these uninsured patients, international students who do have CIHIP or UHIP and then—this also is inclusive of Old Order Mennonites, Low German-speaking folks working in Ontario—they're required a \$5,000 deposit before they will take an initial visit.

So you want to talk about barriers to health care: \$5,000 for an initial visit, even though you're insured, is a true barrier. Additionally, Grand River Hospital is now requiring a \$10,000 up-front deposit for delivery. Now, you have to remember that if you've travelled from, say, Nairobi, and you are specializing in nuclear physics at University of Waterloo and your spouse—but you're still a student, you're not making a lot of money, you're still studying. Five thousand dollars just to see a doctor and \$10,000 to guarantee a delivery of a baby—is this the Ontario dream? Is this the Canadian dream that we've talked about? It is not, remembering that all of us are settlers here in Ontario.

My office has been really great. We're focused on this issue, we're trying to find some solutions, we're trying to find the disconnect. A letter went to the minister around what's happening. But this is important, that the college of physicians and surgeons say that there are no rules around what they can charge uninsured folks. There are no rules, but it feels like they're prioritizing uninsured folks who can pay rather than OHIP folks. This is a growing, emerging issue. I wanted to raise it today in the House, something very fundamentally unfair, unjust around asking \$5,000 just to see an OB/GYN and then also to charge \$10,000 cash to deliver a baby.

In keeping with the theme now, it's pretty dark out there right now, and that's keeping with our total eclipse of common sense here at Queen's Park.

I'm going to move into the affordability piece. Also, just on the groceries, there's a recent survey that showed that when people go to get food, they go to Food Basics, they go to Loblaws, more and more people are shopping for groceries at the dollar store. That stock is doing pretty well, I just want to tell you, More than 31% of Ontario residents voted price gouging as the top reason for escalating food prices.

So there are legislative options that this government could take around addressing price gouging and there was some pretty tough talk from this Premier during the pandemic. I mean, when he held up that bottle of \$20 Windex—"I'm not going to take it anymore," you know. I mean, lots of talk. Talk is so cheap, right? But actually, at the end of the day, when you say that you're going to do something around price gouging, we would encourage you to act on it. Because those legislative tools are there; this government can do this.

This is a fundamental consumer protection issue, and the discrepancy between prices is real. And it's a cost pressure that's impacting the quality of life of the people of this great province, I would say particularly for seniors. I'm definitely seeing more and more seniors in my office, and more and more senior women, I find, because they

certainly do not have the financial independence to secure housing, to secure the kind of food that they want, to actually have the kind of quality of life that they were considering, they were thinking about, that they thought Ontario would offer.

1520

I do also just want to raise the issue around where certain grants are going for this government because my job is to follow the money. Sometimes it goes right down to a very dark hole. And I will say that one of the most egregious issues that we've learned about is around Indigenous communities and the agencies that care for some of those children really accelerating their pricing and their gouging of those costs.

Indigenous communities in northern Ontario have been told on several fronts that agencies that are in the caring industry are actually using First Nations' contracts and viewing those children that come into care which they describe as "cash cows." Now, this is something—forget even the concept of reconciliation, but these agencies in mostly northern Ontario have been caught overcharging and then delivering very poor care for Indigenous communities. This is a doubling down on an abusive pattern that we saw first in residential schools. It's systemic racism and really is colonialism in 2024, I would say. Especially I know that you know that my colleagues have raised some serious issues around mental health. Children are actually being removed from their communities because those mental health resources are not there. I hope that we can agree that we can do better.

I wish that Bill 180 provided better. I hope that as this bill moves through the House, that the government is amenable to fixing this bill, because it needs to be fixed and there needs to be dedicated resources that are enveloped particularly in the not-for-profit sector, which is basically holding the very social fabric of Ontario together. I don't know how they're doing it. There was this very poignant moment during pre-budget consultations when we were at the Holiday Inn down in Oakville and the PSE sector was before us. I think it was the president of the council of universities, and he was saying, "Listen, we can't do it anymore. We're at a tipping point. We're at a breaking point on infrastructure on campuses across Ontario." And, at that point, there was some rain coming through the ceiling and so the really good staff from broadcast came together and they covered their equipment, and we just kept talking about how bad things are getting in the post-secondary education sector. Then, it started to rain a little bit heavier—this is in the ballroom during pre-budget consultation. Then at one point, I think Steve Orsini said that the infrastructure is on the brink of collapse, and that's when the ceiling did collapse in the pre-budget consultation. I've actually never seen anything like it, but I thought it was also very symbolic as well.

So the post-secondary education sector, as our critic outlined this morning, is on the brink of really having to make very tough decisions around class sizes, around training of staff, around retaining some staff, and you know, if we can agree on a few things, it's that when you

invest in future generations, that return on investment through education pays back in huge dividends. It really does. Just like the core infrastructure piece around Enbridge and ensuring that we're not saddling future generations with these stranded assets of gas lines. I mean it deserves an honest answer: Why are we subsidizing the building of gas pipelines for Enbridge? That time has come, and it has gone. Yet, we have a Minister of Energy who is firmly supporting the use of tax dollars in those subsidies.

I do want to say, "Environmental Defence Condemns Ontario's Move to Overrule OEB Decision to Benefit Enbridge." It's also worth noting—and this is actually by Keith Brooks, who is the program director. This is a quote about the legislation that the Minister of Energy brought in, which is going to keep your gas bills higher: "This legislation would be bad for new homeowners, bad for existing gas customers ... bad for the environment. The only one that benefits is Enbridge Gas." Then it goes on to say, "This is all too similar to the greenbelt scandal: The government is legislating against the public good in the services of a few private interests, namely Enbridge and housing developers."

So no lessons have been learned from the greenbelt. If you're looking at what's happening in Wilmot right now, the government is really doubling down on those backroom deals that are actually ensuring that sprawl becomes the new reality for Ontario. We can't afford sprawl. We need to be very strategic around investments, especially around energy.

Listen, the potential of actually good local jobs on conservation—that reality really is there, and there is a consumer protection perspective. If you are focused on conservation, where the smart money is, those good local jobs to replace the windows, to do the heat pumps—those are local trades. You can't outsource those to China. Then, you also have tax credits, which people will apply for because these exchanges are not happening in the underground economy. They're actually happening in real time by qualified, skilled people, which also ensures that the work is done to a standard which is commensurate with the talent of the people who are doing the work. It is like a win-win-win-win all around. You think this government's doing that? No, they're not.

Also, with regard to Enbridge and this Minister of Energy fighting the independent legislator, it says, "This legislation also sets a dangerous precedent: This is the first time any government of Ontario has overruled a decision by the independent Ontario Energy Board. The board's mandate is to keep energy costs down, and that's what drove this decision."

So you have a Minister of Energy fighting an independent organization that has a mandate to keep your energy bills down. He's fighting that agency. That is a perfect microcosm of what's happening in Ontario right now around who this government is working for and who they are leaving behind. What a lost potential and opportunity in a budget of \$214 billion to keep focused on those corporate profits and not on keeping costs down for

the people of Ontario. It truly is. You really are out-Liberaling the Liberals, I have to say.

There were a lot of things I wanted to talk about, but I do want to mention the justice file, because we met with the Ontario Trial Lawyers Association recently to talk about the backlog in the courtrooms, and I sort of started this with Emily, who was here a week and a half ago, whose rapist walked free, and also Cait, who never even got her day in court because the timeline to deal with the criminal charges had expired. These are perfect examples of how broken the system is. When people have the courage to come forward after being sexually assaulted and talking to police about what they experienced, everyone who we've spoken to references the re-traumatization of their whole experience by going into the police station and also going through the court system and then, obviously, seeing their perpetrator walk away. That's not tough on crime.

Having a justice system that deals with these very serious issues in real time, that keeps people safe, particularly women—we do have an amazing motion, a PMB that's going to be coming forward later this week, which is calling on the government to recognize that intimate partner violence is an epidemic. Why not acknowledge that? I mean, with the number of women who have been killed most recently in Sault Ste. Marie, a whole family, because often children are also victims in these cases, what would be the harm for this government to acknowledge that this level of violence against women and against partners exists in Ontario? Is it just pure ideology? Because even when we ask questions of substance around the response of the justice system and of prevention of violence against women, the government will come back and say something about the carbon tax.

1530

Let me tell you, if you know someone who's gone through that court system, who has experienced that kind of violence, and we ask a serious question about the lack of response, the lack of dignity, the lack of integrity that these women experience as they go through the justice system and you come back with, "Well, why aren't you writing a letter to the federal government about the carbon tax?"—ironically, even though we have a carbon tax in Ontario because this Premier cancelled cap-and-trade and the federal backstop came into play, the only reason we have a carbon tax in Ontario is because of this government, Madam Speaker; right? The cap-and-trade program—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Whatever.

The cap-and-trade program, honestly, was very focused on the highest industrial polluters and then that funding would go back to the greening—investing back in those businesses, in that manufacturing. I mean, based on how few times we've seen climate change in the budget, it's almost like you've got your head in the sand on this one, because the smart money is on conservation, the smart money is on strategic investment.

And the lack of transparency around the funding in this place—really, I'm just going to circle back to this—is very

key to the undermining of our democracy, which I see and I feel we are seeing in real-time at Queen's Park; way worse than the Liberals I have to say—way worse. When you have a Minister of Energy overriding public good to benefit a corporation like Enbridge, you have lost the plot and this budget does not meet the moment. If you were looking for support from this government around affordability, it is not in Bill 180, I give you that much.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We'll go to questions.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I just picked up on the last sentence of the member's one-hour presentation on the budget, and she talked about a government that has no transparency. I would like to ask the member opposite why is it, then, that the Auditor General, who was here under both the previous Liberal administration and ours, who served for 10 years under different administrations, where every single Liberal budget, every single Liberal legislation that went through with respect to energy costs was condemned by the Auditor General—this government has had six clean audits. Let me repeat that: six clean audits. So, I beg to differ. I don't know what the member opposite's talking about. To me, that's transparency.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you so much for the question.

Let's remember that the Auditor General has one job, and that is to follow the money that has been spent, right. The female or the male auditor does not have purview of looking at where the money was spent well or where it was spent where it was needed. The mandate of the Auditor General has been challenged many times by this government. In fact, I would ask the member why has this Conservative government doubled down on the watered-down advertising policy that you criticized the Liberals for?

The Auditor General can only work within their mandate; I will tell you that much. Why is it that the Financial Accountability Officer and their expenditure monitor say that when you say you're going to invest \$5 million to the Alzheimer's Society and that money doesn't flow for 2021, 2022, 2023, that number is an atrocious record of this government? You say you're going to invest and then you don't get the money out the door. I mean, that is a failure of leadership, if I've ever seen it.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

MPP Jamie West: Thank you to the member for Waterloo on her debate. I always enjoy listening to her debate on the budget.

One of the things that stood out to me in this budget is the \$1 billion that has been spent on agency nurses. That is a balloon of a massive increase of spending for agency nurses. There is a role for agency nurses, but it is exploding. How it has exploded is that instead of having nurses with a regular income and a 40-hour week, they're hiring agency nurses that charge about double, and a lot of that money goes to the profit of these private companies. It's a way for public money—your OHIP card—to be spent on private agencies and to fatten their pockets.

Could the member explain why in the world the Conservative government, if they were for the little guy, wouldn't put a stop to this and curtail this back down so it wasn't a balloon of \$1 billion?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's such a good question.

If a government has a choice before them to do the right thing for the people who we're elected to serve, to make sure that the public as a whole is getting good value for money, that the money from a return on investment is ensuring that we have healthier people in the province, why would they then look to agency nurses, agencies who—many are publicly traded. Why would that be okay with the government to pay that nurse three times what a hospital nurse or acute-care nurse is making on the floor? In what Conservative fiscal world does that make any sense, paying three times as much for not having consistent care?

I mentioned my future daughter-in-law works alongside agency nurses. The agency nurse comes in as a temp, right? There's no team. There's no coordination of care. And she's dealing with the smallest, most vulnerable babies in Waterloo region. It makes no sense, and it's fiscally irresponsible, I would argue.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Brian Saunderson: My question to the member opposite. I've heard her comments being very dismissive of this government's environmental record, and I'd draw her attention to the AG's report of May last year, in which the Auditor General said that we are 90% of our way to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions from 2005 levels by 2030.

We also know that this government is partnering to green our steel industry, which is some of our largest emitters. In this budget, we're committing \$20 million to the Greenlands Conservation Partnership, which since 2019 has amassed 168,000 hectares of green space. That's 20% of the size of the greenbelt. We're committing \$24 million to the innovative Lake Simcoe Phosphorus Reduction Strategy, and we're committing \$6.4 million to protect and restore the Great Lakes shorelines, which is very important to my community.

So my question to the member opposite is, will she admit that this government and Ontario are leading Canada in greenhouse gas emissions targets, and based on this budget we'll continue to do that and we'll exceed our targets?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Well, it's good to see the member writing, reading and believing their own press releases, because when your Minister of Energy undermines the independent energy regulator the way that he has, where you're absolutely finding on parts of Enbridge—you're working for Enbridge, not for the people of Ontario. That is so very clear. You have no conservation strategy. In places like Wilmot in the region of Waterloo, you're paving over prime agricultural land.

There is no doubt that you are moving completely in the wrong direction, and at the end of the day, this budget does not meet the needs of Ontarians. In fact, you're doubling

down on natural gas, which the independent regulator has said will leave us with stranded assets. You are setting this province up to fail on the energy file, and it should come back to bite you.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank my seat-mate from Waterloo for her presentation, especially the remark that this is a total eclipse of common sense. We've seen so many policy reversals from this government that they're stuck in reverse. It's almost as though, with Bill 180, I'm wondering what they're also going to do a one-eighty on when it comes to these decisions. We do see, however, great help towards Enbridge and sprawl developers.

Now, the government recently created a \$300,000 state-controlled media studio, complete with teleprompters so Conservative staffers could think for the ministers, you know, to put in and type their answers up onscreen. Was this investment a priority for Ontarians at this time?

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Ms. Catherine Fife: I did get asked in a scrum about a week ago about this, and yes, the government decided that they needed another media studio. It's a cost of \$300,000 to \$350,000. It's a very controlled environment, where the media can only ask one question and one follow-up question. The media as a whole feel like this is just another way for the government to avoid accountability and transparency—which, this government is now fully embracing the lack of accountability and transparency. And so, no, the people of this province did not put out a call-out for a bunker media studio over in the finance building, where the media have to go in order to hear what the government is doing. That is not how an open and transparent government works. One would even say you're not even open for business on the media part.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I want to thank the member opposite for her comments. Actually, 60 minutes—well done.

Coming back from my previous role as a Tecumseh town councillor, the barrier for us to build more housing was access to infrastructure. This budget has \$1 billion to the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program allocated. That's going to be a game-changer in communities like mine, where housing is in short supply, the municipality is not wealthy enough to finance it on their own, and developers really are small-town, smallish developers that can't up-front the money. So do you see this as being a worthwhile investment to get shovels in the ground on new housing?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. We're served on the finance committee together, and we heard the same things from delegations.

I will say that what we heard is that municipalities, through Bill 23, identified a \$1-billion loss every year for infrastructure. So the fact that the government is coming

back with \$1.3 billion is really a bit of a shell game, right? You're taking that \$1 billion a year away from municipalities through the loss of development fees. Developers are happy about that. But then you're subsidizing that infrastructure cost with taxpayer dollars, so people in Ontario get to pay twice, really, for these infrastructure promises.

What I will say is that there's so much room for improvement with municipalities right now. They are hungry for some leadership. But they are also, as I indicated with Wilmot, moving—the lack of transparency around housing developments right now is a real problem, and in Wilmot, paving over 770 acres of prime agricultural land is very problematic for us.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): That's time. We're going to move to further debate.

I recognize the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Mr. McCarthy has moved the adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Interjection: On division.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Motion carried on division.

Second reading debate adjourned.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 8, 2024, on the amendment to the motion regarding amendments to the standing orders.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate? Further debate? Further debate?

Mr. Fraser has moved that the motion be amended as follows:

By deleting everything from "Standing order 115(b)" to "Standing order 115(f) is deleted" inclusive; and

By inserting the following: "Standing order 35(g) is amended by adding, 'In addition to the Speaker's allotment of questions to independent members under this standing order, the Speaker may also allot to independent members the slots for what would otherwise be the third and fifth questions allotted to government members.'"

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

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

The motion is lost.

Mr. Jones, Chatham–Kent–Leamington, has moved government notice of motion number 24 regarding amendments to the standing orders.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

BUILDING A BETTER ONTARIO ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2024

LOI DE 2024 VISANT À BÂTIR
UN ONTARIO MEILLEUR
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 8, 2024, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 180, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 180, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Further debate?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: It gives me great pleasure to rise in support of our government's budget for 2024. Two weeks ago, my colleague the Minister of Finance and member for Pickering—Uxbridge spoke in this House and delivered a blueprint for building Ontario's economy. The 2024 budget, Building a Better Ontario, builds on our government's track record of success, supporting the people and the communities of Ontario through smart and responsive investments in key public services and infrastructure. It is a budget that says to all businesses that we are invested in your success and that we will work with you to grow and to contribute to a bright future for our province.

This is a strategy to invest in the economy, to create good jobs and to build a better Ontario. This plan invests in the future of Ontario—our children—and for them, we will spare no effort to get it done. This budget is an honest appraisal of the challenges facing Ontario, assessing the current political landscape and charting an optimistic course forward for the people, the businesses and the communities of our great province.

Like the rest of the world, Ontario continues to face economic uncertainty due to circumstances beyond our control. These include high interest rates and global instability. We know how these challenges affect Ontario families and Ontario businesses. High inflation and high Bank of Canada interest rates have pushed costs up. Families have struggled with mortgage rates, rents and grocery prices. With increased costs, families feel immense pressure and face difficult choices in their day-to-day lives. Our small businesses, the backbone of our economy and the creators of well-paying jobs, have trouble coping with inflationary pressures and high interest rates. We know this all too well.

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These factors also have a profound effect on the province's finances. The province does project deficits in 2024-25 and 2025-26, but our plan includes a path to balance the budget in 2026-27. And, Speaker, this government, under the leadership of the Premier, is resilient. We look to the future with confidence as we continue to work hand in hand with Ontarians to build the Ontario of tomorrow.

We are investing in the future, in growth, infrastructure, economic development and local communities across Ontario, and our government takes pride in the fact that this will be done without raising taxes or without raising fees.

This budget is a commitment to the people of Ontario that this government has their backs and will continue to make principled decisions to help our province moving forward. This instills confidence in our markets and tells the world that Ontario is strong and Ontario is a leader and that this government is making the smart investments we need to become better than ever. Our budget is a plan to build by investing to attract better jobs, to build roads, highways and public transit while keeping costs down for families and businesses.

Speaker, the province of Ontario created almost 900,000 net new jobs over the past three years—the fastest growth on record. Our strengthened economy is estimated to be on track to boost employment growth over the next three years.

As the Minister of Finance indicated, inflation, as measured by the consumer price index, is projected to remain under 3% this year and then reduce to 2% over the following two years.

Our government, under the leadership of the Premier, is leading the charge in ensuring that Ontario's economy is prosperous. We are making sensible choices and we are sticking to our plan to get it done for all Ontarians. We are keeping taxes low, cutting red tape and investing in our workers. It is this government that is taking on the responsibility of building Ontario.

Speaker, we do frequently debate about infrastructure in this House. We do so because of our government's unwavering commitment to build the vital infrastructure that Ontario needs—an infrastructure that serves as the backbone of a thriving society and the foundation upon which economic growth, job creation and community development are built.

Our government understands the pivotal role that robust infrastructure plays in connecting communities, fostering innovation and enhancing the overall quality of life for our residents and citizens.

Let me review some of the ways that we are doing that, as set out in this budget for 2024: By 2046, the population in the greater Golden Horseshoe is expected to reach 15 million—close to the population of the entire province today. This will result in growth by approximately one million new residents every five years. We must act now to build the roads, the highways, the bridges and the public transit that our growing province needs. That means tackling gridlock and saving commuters time by advancing critical highway projects like the new Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. It means expanding existing, in-demand highways like Highway 401 and Highway 7, supporting the construction of new interchanges and improving roads, highways and bridges in communities all across Ontario.

My ministry, Speaker, is also playing a vital role in the building of new infrastructure through Bill 153, the

Building Infrastructure Safely Act, which passed this House unanimously earlier this year and received royal assent on March 6. This will create a catalyst for the positive change that our province needs, one that ensures that our infrastructure projects are pillars of strength for future generations to come.

Our government has also taken the steps in keeping costs low for drivers by proposing to ban any new tolls on new and existing provincial highways. This ban would also apply to the Don Valley Parkway and the Gardiner Expressway, once uploaded to the province. This government, of course, already removed the tolls on Highways 412 and 418 in April 2022, during the term of the 42nd Parliament.

It has also been two years since our government's removal of licence plate renewal fees and stickers for passenger vehicles, light-duty trucks, motorcycles and mopeds. This change has resulted in annual savings of \$120 for vehicle owners in southern Ontario and \$60 each year for vehicle owners in northern Ontario. And with Bill 162, the Get It Done Act, we are reaffirming our pledge to ensure affordability and to reduce costs and burdens by enshrining into law the freeze on Ontario driver licence and photo card fees.

We are also making the entire licence renewal process automatic, providing convenience and saving precious time for all citizens and residents of the province. It is important to note, Speaker, that until automatic renewal is enabled vehicle owners still do need to renew their licence plates, but, obviously, at no cost. They can do so online or in person at one of our ServiceOntario centres. Renewing licence plates is one of over 55 of our government services now available to Ontarians online 24/7 through ServiceOntario. It is one of the many ways we have improved ServiceOntario's service delivery, along with an appointment-booking system to book multiple services in a single appointment or even a single appointment for the whole family. My ministry and ServiceOntario are committed to continuing to make strides to make it more convenient for citizens to access vital government services, and we will continue to evolve these services to best support Ontarians in our ever-changing and increasingly digital landscape.

Our budget is also supporting the largest transit expansion in North America. This includes bringing back two daily weekday train trips on the Milton GO line and moving forward with our plan to provide two-way all-day GO service to Milton.

Closer to home, this budget has provided funding to improve and expand GO train service to Bowmanville in my riding of Durham. With Durham's population growing, especially for commuters to Toronto, this service would help them get where they need to be faster, while at the same time saving precious time to focus on what matters to our fellow citizens and residents and their families.

We are also bringing fast and reliable transit to downtown Mississauga and Brampton by expanding the Hazel McCallion light rail transit line, including a two-

kilometre extension and a loop through to Confederation Parkway.

Four major subway projects in the GTA are under way. These include the Ontario Line, the three-stop Scarborough subway extension, the Yonge North subway extension into York region and the Eglinton Crosstown West extension, with a planned connection to Pearson international airport, one of the largest employment areas in Canada.

We are funding construction of station and track improvements to restore the Northlander. To restore the Northlander is a key part of our government's plan. This passenger rail service between Toronto and northern Ontario was ended by the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, and we are bringing it back.

We are keeping costs down and saving daily public transit riders on participating systems an average of \$1,600 a year. That is an accurate figure of \$1,600 a year—tremendous savings for individual commuters. This savings of \$1,600 per year is through our government's newly enacted One Fare program, and I congratulate both our Minister of Transportation and our Associate Minister of Transportation for rolling that out.

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Our students and seniors, as well as all transit riders, will only have to pay once to transfer between GO Transit, the TTC and other participating transit systems in the GTA. Cross-boundary travel in our province has never been more affordable and has never been just as convenient as this.

Speaker, I have mentioned previously how fast Ontario's population is growing: More than five million more people will be living in the province over the next 20 years, and that's a conservative estimate. It may well be more. We welcome all the newcomers, and we have to be ready for them because Ontario's strength is newcomers.

Not only do we need more road and transit capacity; we need more homes, and we need more infrastructure to support new home developments. Beyond highways and transit, beyond housing and hospitals, investments in infrastructure affect every aspect of our province's future growth. It is why we are aggressively working to attract more investment in all of the province's infrastructure needs.

The Building Ontario Fund will help build more projects in areas like clean energy generation, long-term care and student housing. At the Darlington nuclear plant in my riding of Durham, we are moving forward with adding three additional small modular reactors. This will help our government move forward with the mandate of clean energy and keeping costs low for the citizens and residents of Ontario. We're starting with an allocation of \$3 billion, Speaker, and the fund will create opportunities for pension funds to put their members' investments to work right here in Ontario.

We are also supporting Ontario's mining sector by investing an additional \$15 million over three years in the Critical Minerals Innovation Fund to help the sector undertake research and development and commercialize

innovations. The economic potential of the critical minerals in the Ring of Fire is enormous, and our government has made it a goal to take advantage of Ontario's natural resources for positive purposes.

We want to help power Ontario's electric vehicle battery supply chains. By unlocking minerals mined in Ontario, we will power electric vehicles. These vehicles will be built in new Ontario factories by Ontario workers, purchased in Ontario and around the world. Our government has made massive investments into EV battery production, including a \$7-billion investment for a new Volkswagen plant in St. Thomas to manufacture cars with clean and renewable energy.

We are also increasing the Northern Energy Advantage Program to a total of \$167 million in 2024-25 and \$206 million annually in 2025-26 and 2026-27. We are helping eligible large industrial operators manage electricity costs and create good jobs in northern Ontario. Ontario needs this sector to prosper, Speaker, as new jobs are created and skilled workers in this province are needed to fill these new jobs.

Speaker, this government is investing in our skilled workers with an additional \$100 million in 2024-25 alone in the Skills Development Fund training stream. There are rewarding careers in the skilled trades, and this government is investing in the young people ready to take on this challenge, this new vocation, this new path to prosperity.

Speaking of education, the budget supports the growth of young minds with an investment of close to \$172 million for the 2024-25 school year. This is for targeted math and reading supports and an updated kindergarten curriculum, starting in just a year and a half, in September 2025. An investment of \$23 billion over 10 years, including about \$16 billion in capital grants, will help build, expand and renew schools and child care spaces right across Ontario.

This includes \$1.3 billion for the current school year to support the construction, repair and renewal needs of schools. This investment helps our citizens and residents across the province, including in my riding of Durham. We have provided funding for a brand new public elementary school in Bowmanville, and we've also added a brand new edition to St. Anne Catholic Elementary School in North Oshawa. As previously mentioned, this budget is working toward the future; that is why this government is investing in our youth.

We are also supporting families and students across Ontario by extending the tuition freeze at Ontario's publicly assisted colleges and universities for at least three more years. And to help Ontario communities grow and thrive, we introduced a \$200-million investment in an application-based Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund to strengthen communities across Ontario.

Speaker, our government is supporting the health and well being of children, families and seniors. That means continuing our substantial investments in our health care system. The 2024 budget affirms our support for hospital

expansion, the largest in the province's history; \$50 billion over the next 10 years, and that includes close to \$36 billion in capital grants.

We are investing an additional \$965 million this year alone, including a 4% increase in total base hospital funding, committing \$620 million over 10 years to allow health care system partners to address urgent infrastructure renewal needs.

We know also how important it is to have a primary care provider, and we are investing in more family doctors, including the investment in a new medical school at York University with a primary focus on training family doctors; and \$128 million over the next three years to support enrolment increases of 2,000 registered nurses and 1,000 registered practical nurses.

One of our mandates is improving mental health and addiction services, and so an additional \$396 million investment over three years is at hand. As noted in the budget, we are providing support to about 100,000 low-income seniors by expanding the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System Program. And we are increasing public safety, investing in fighting auto theft with an investment of \$49 million and \$46 million over three years to purchase four police helicopters.

This is a testament to our government's commitment to all aspects of what we need to build and shape a future of progress in prosperity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Lorne Coe): Thank you for your presentation. Moving on to questions, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The budget talks about affordability, but there's not one word about grocery prices, that's because the government knows food prices are high because companies like Loblaws, owned by the Weston family, are gouging consumers and they don't want to provide help to families. At the same time, food banks are dealing with a massive increase in demand for their services.

Project SHARE, a not-for-profit in my community, is now saying one in eight Niagara Falls residents are using food banks, and 25% are children. These not-for-profits receive no funding in this budget, no funding, no new funding in this 2024 budget. Frankly, these food banks need help, and the grocery chains need to be held accountable.

Will your government commit to taking on "greedflation" and supporting food banks with new funding right across the province of Ontario?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Well, of course, this investment in the people of Ontario is about all of the people of Ontario. This budget invests in helping people in maintaining and continuing the gas tax cut and maintaining all of the financial relief. The real issue with grocery prices is the dreaded carbon tax imposed by the federal government, increased on April 1. It raises the cost of everything.

It's the high interest rates that the government of Canada's Bank of Canada is not responding soon enough to deal with. So, instead of the catcalling, join us in continuing to support what we can do as a government. As a provincial Parliament, we are doing it all. What we are

calling up the federal government to do we will continue to call upon them to do, and that is ending the carbon tax.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: The minister had spoken about certain health care investments that were made in this budget, and I want to refer to a couple of health care investments that are important to the constituents of my riding of Essex; first of all, one which increased the number of patients that can be rostered to a nurse practitioner by 1,200 people. That's another 1,200 people who are going to get primary care in my riding of Essex, and in addition to that, a new hospital, which is now in phase 2 of development for the region. That's another promise that was made to this region, a promise that was previously made by another government but not fulfilled, but that was picked up by this government and indeed fulfilled.

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So I'm wondering if the minister might comment on the various excellent health care investments that are made in this budget because I can tell you that my constituents in the riding of Essex are definitely pleased with the health care advancements being made in our area.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: Thank you to the member for Essex for that excellent question and for his advocacy for his community.

The Minister of Finance well appreciates that these announcements are province-wide, but we see the results on the ground in Essex. We see the results on the ground in Durham. It is a record investment: \$50 billion to build and upgrade new hospitals, investments by the millions in new family doctors for better primary care across the province in each district of the province, and, of course, investing in the ability to have primary care by way of nurse practitioners. This is innovation in health care and with the investments made in this budget.

The same old ways of doing things are not adequate. We need the investments. We have the record investments. We're seeing them in each riding and district, and we're seeing it done in innovative ways. When we speak of primary care, we speak of not only more family doctors, but more nurse practitioners. We speak of empowering pharmacists to work with the customers they know best with the 13 common ailments. Investing in innovation, investing in people, is the right way forward. We're doing that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Joel Harden: Thanks to my friend from Durham for those comments. I do have a question for him, though, because it is a common refrain I hear from friends in the government that they're all about never increasing the costs of living through regulation and taxes. I've heard it often.

But, Speaker, to the member: What do we call the refusal to extend public programs and, when that refusal to extend those public programs happens, the cost of living goes up?

I'll give you a case in point: We desperately need primary care, nurse practitioners, family physicians in the city of Ottawa. In this latest round, there is talk of one

nurse practitioner proposal being funded in the market—a terrific one; I'm very supportive of it—but there are 160,000 people in the city of Ottawa who do not have a family doctor or nurse practitioner. So what do they do? They go down the road to one of these clinics that is, frankly, I believe, breaking the rules of the Canada Health Act, charging people \$400 membership fees, charging women \$110 to get a Pap test. Those are costs that are borne by the taxpayer because the government doesn't extend services. I'm wondering if my friend—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. I'll have to interrupt, to allow the minister to respond.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: There's a great myth out there that our wonderful health care system is free. It's not free. It's funded by this government, and it's being funded by this government at record levels. Because of this investment—never before seen in this province, never before funded by any government to the level we're funding it, along with innovations—the funding for primary care will support connecting approximately 600,000 more people to team-based primary care through new and expanded interprofessional care teams. It's about teams, it's about family doctors, but it's about nurse practitioners and a whole array of health care professionals.

This builds on last year's budget commitment. We'll continue to build. We'll continue to invest for all the people in Ontario. We're enhancing primary care, and we're innovating and investing at once.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, this budget has a lot of good investments, a lot of good things. Something that the members from Mississauga and Peel region have been asking about is insurance.

I'm just going to quote something from Amanda Dean, the VP of the Ontario and Atlantic insurance bureau. She said, "IBC and its members welcome the government's auto insurance reforms, which are a good ... step in giving Ontarians more control and choice over their auto insurance coverage. We have long advocated for much-needed reforms that provide consumers with more choice and options when purchasing auto insurance." This is one of the things which I have seen.

To the Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery, my question is: Minister, for your riding, what do you think in this budget you like the most, which you would like to share with your residents?

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I thank the member for his question. He mentioned auto insurance, and it's one aspect of affordability.

People have to be able to make choices. When it comes to the gas taxes, we have maintained a cut to provide for affordability. We have brought in and extended other measures so that people do not have to make the choice to not drive their cars.

We, on the other hand, with auto insurance, have left the choice for affordability up to the individual citizen by providing the opt-out option to provide lower premiums. It's not an opt-in but an opt-out. If a particular person with

their insurance broker determines that they have more insurance than they need for a particular aspect of their lives, such as an income replacement benefit, this budget will provide for a program by way they can opt out of that. Why should they have to pay for insurance twice? That creates affordability by choice and that's a key aspect of our auto insurance initiative in this budget.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I listened to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport talk about the budget, and one of the things he mentioned was that we have to have smart public investment in key public services. That's what he said. And just now, he talked about how this health care is funded by this government; I'll remind the member that it's actually funded by the people, the taxpayers. That's why this government has the money to fund health care.

But what this government has done is actually not use the money correctly—hasn't been wise. Because Bill 124 is an unconstitutional bill that you wasted taxpayers' money—you lost that case. Now you actually have to make up for those wages. That is an oversight of—a far supreme error. The other one that this government has wasted money on is spending \$1 billion on agency nurses.

These are not investments in our public system; these are wasteful acts of this government. Can you explain why this happens under your government all the time?

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): The minister for a quick response.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: I can say, Speaker, as a relatively new member of this House, that I was impressed with our government's initiative in the 42nd Parliament, and I'm even more impressed being a member of this House and of this government now with the investments—the smart investments, the innovative investments.

I stay in touch regularly with people in my riding and across the province, and I hear it from nurses on the front line and from physicians. I was with health care professionals yesterday at an event in my riding for Autism Home Base and they applaud our government's smart investments, our innovation in how health care is delivered. And that is the answer. That is the way forward.

I am thankful for our dedicated professionals, our doctors and our nurses and others—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you. We've spent all the time we had for questions and answers. I thank the minister.

I will move to further debate.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: It's always an honour to rise in this esteemed House to speak on behalf of the great people of Toronto Centre.

I'm here, as we all are, to debate government Bill 180, the budget bill. Obviously, it's a bill that actually sets forward the spending priorities of the government; it also, as in every budget, lays out the priorities and the values of the government of the day.

I think that we have all heard quite a bit of debate now about the things that the government is interested in doing,

but I want to dial back, Speaker, to the time of the pre-consultation budgets.

When those pre-consultation sessions were rolling out across Ontario, Speaker, as a Toronto representative, I must note once again in this House that the city of Toronto, the capital of this province, was deliberately excluded from the budget pre-consultations. That means 2.8 million people. The financial heart, the cultural capital of the province was not at the table. We had to go elsewhere in order for our voices to be heard. This is a city that generates over \$430 billion of GDP for the province and the country, and it just is absolutely mind-blowing that we didn't have our own pre-budget consultation date here in the city.

But we did hear from a number of other stakeholders, including Toronto stakeholders that had to leave the city to be heard. We heard from many different communities and stakeholders, and I want to just highlight that some of the concerns that was brought forward to us at the hearings have to be read into the record one more time, Speaker.

We heard that now in Ontario, life is harder than ever before. The cost-of-living crisis that faces us requires real solutions, Speaker. We have a housing crisis that's gripping every single household and ripping apart their budget. That's making life extremely difficult for families. So we are looking for solutions in this budget that address the needs of hard-working, struggling Ontarians. That's what I was looking for when the budget was released. That's what Ontarians were looking for as well.

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Let me tell you, Speaker, what Ontarians told us during the pre-budget consultation. Let's also think about what Ontarians are asking and speaking about after the budget was released.

They said that the government should invest in proactive solutions to Ontario's publicly funded and publicly delivered health care system and provide immediate support for community mental health programs and support for community health care coverage. That needs to be expanded under OHIP.

They also said that we need to make meaningful investments in order for us to combat the devastating impact of worker burnout and stress for workers impacted by the understaffing and under-resourcing of many different programs that are government-funded.

We also heard from Ontarians—and this was at every single budget session—that this government needed to directly invest in the creation of affordable and supportive housing. It's not good enough to just leave it to the free-market forces expecting the for-profit developers to meet our needs when it comes to social as well as rent-geared-to-income housing.

They also told us that we needed to invest in public education at consistent and appropriate levels so that our post-secondary institutions as well as our public institutions would no longer have to come cap in hand every year with a request. Therefore, they wanted a government that was going to partner with them in a respectful manner. They said that this government needed to repair

the formula for post-secondary education to ensure that Ontario keeps pace with its counterparts across Canada.

They also said—and this is very important, because we're going to have a moment very shortly in this House to allow the government to correct the record. They also said that the government of the day needed to adopt the Renfrew county inquest recommendations—86 recommendations directly directed at the Ontario government. The first recommendation, which costs you absolutely nothing, is to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic so that this government would be able to address the problem with the same type of urgency and focused intention.

Speaker, I mentioned that this government would have an opportunity to correct the record because on April 10, in two days, this House will have a chance to debate it. This government will then have their opportunity to go on the record and adopt the Renfrew county inquest recommendation.

We also heard from community members and advocates and Ontarians about the need to double the ODSP rates. Right now, in this moment in time, we are legislating poverty and condemning people to a life of hardship through acts of government. We need to be able to reverse that as soon as possible. You can even say, Speaker, that as people choose medically assisted suicide, that is a form of social murder.

We need to protect and invest in Ontario's libraries, museums and cultural institutions while recognizing their vital importance as economic drivers—very basic what I would call value propositions that allow us to build this budget.

Budgets, as we know, are going to be confidence bills. As the government likes to taunt, "Is the official opposition going to support us?" Well, you would get support if it was adequate, if there was adequate funding. It's very difficult to support a bill that says we have confidence in the government when there isn't enough to work with.

So across the province, we heard from health care providers who shared very practical solutions to the many challenges to our health care system. Speaker, as we all know in this House, it has been said time and time again that 2.3 million Ontarians do not have a family physician. This number is going to swell alarmingly to 4.4 million by 2026, in two short years, unless swift action is taken.

The average family physician spends about 40% of their work week on administrative tasks that pull them away from other patients. The recommendation from the Ontario Medical Association is to provide efficiency initiatives to reduce non-clinical work and to improve access to care for patients. It's something that this side of the House and the official opposition strongly supports, and we would absolutely put that into play if we were the government of the day. But we actually put that in play by putting the motion before this House so that this House could adopt that and move towards reducing the administrative burden on family physicians so they can do more and actually help the patients that they desperately want to help.

Speaker, we also heard from physicians as well as nurses who work in emergency departments, and what they have shared with us is that they are seeing massive closures in unprecedented manners. And this is largely due to a shortage of nurses, nurses who are leaving the field at unprecedented rates due to burnout and to overcapacity struggles. Closures and long wait times caused by understaffing result in delays or misdiagnoses, leading patients to return to the emergency department in much worse shape. This is shameful. We are a very rich province. We can certainly do better. But we are not going to be able to meet the problem with the actual solutions if the government has its head in the sand.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario emphasized that in implementing staffing ratios, there has to be a minimum nurse-to-patient ratio. It's the only way to address retention. If no action is taken, Ontario will suffer a shortage of 30,000 nurses—a staggering 30,000 nurses—by 2028. Also, closing the wage gap that nurses experience and closing the private clinics, which we know that the ONA has claimed and reported is undermining the public health care system. All of this is setting the way for privatization, something that this government is blatantly, intentionally dedicated to, and they're not even hiding it anymore.

I want to speak about the need to ensure that we can provide funding that is stable and reliable for safe consumption sites. I represent Toronto Centre, known as the downtown east, and I can tell you that my community is hit very hard. We have safe consumption sites, Speaker, that are funded largely, 100%, by private donations. Safe consumption sites are a continuum of care in the health care system and you cannot help people if they keep dying, especially if there is a solution to reverse that horrific trend. The province needs to step up and do it quickly in order for them to save lives. Right now, they are not.

In northern Ontario, there are only three safe consumption sites and only one of them is federally funded. I'm not sure what this government is waiting for, but it's clear to me that those who are living with addictions are not their priority. But they are family members and I can tell you that that is the priority of the families.

Mental health is a massive concern for Ontarians. We are facing a mental health crisis and the official opposition has been ringing this bell over and over again, saying that we are willing to work with you on solutions to address the problems that are being caught downstream. They are being caught in ER departments. They are being caught by our hard-working police officers. They are being caught in our school system and they do not have the resources and the skill set to address this problem.

Agencies that provide mental health care in Ontario are looking for multi-year funding to stabilize, sustain and build the sector. They are literally at a crisis point and they have been for years, but pretty soon, the runway is going to be gone. They have asked the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to consider the plight of the families, and this same message would go to the Premier and to everyone sitting on the front bench in cabinet. They

have asked them to put themselves into the shoes of those families, to empathize with their pain about what it feels like to surrender a child simply because their community lacked the appropriate mental health supports.

1630

I have a son who is just about five years old. I do everything I can to provide care for him; my partner and I both do. It would break my heart if I couldn't care for him, and that's exactly what's happening to families right across Ontario, because they're not getting the support from this government. Speaker, we all know about the alarming, damning statistics and the backlog with the Ontario Autism Program. We are not seeing this government do enough, nor are we seeing them coordinate and lead on these files, and we desperately need to.

Cities cannot experience the download of mental health and other social services and that this government asks that cities and neighbourhoods pick up the tab, but that's exactly what they're doing when they passed Bill 23 and then promised that they were going to make these cities whole. By on one hand stripping away their ability to actually raise the revenues they need, and then at the same time underfunding and defunding the mental health system, you downloaded it once again. We saw this with the Harris government, we saw this with the McGuinty government, and now it's happening with this Conservative government.

We're also facing a demographic tsunami. This is where individuals who are 65 and older are going to become, at some point in time, a sizable portion of the population. Right now, it sits at 20%. By 2031 it will be 25% and by 2040 the population of individuals who are 80 years old and over is going to double. There is no planning in this budget, or anywhere else in this government's priorities, that says that they acknowledge that this problem is here and that they're ready to work with the sector and to hear from families to come up with the solution. Things are only going to get worse if the investments and, just as importantly, the leadership coordination and the partnership with the sectors are absent.

Seniors can live safely in their communities—many of them can. They also want to live productively in their homes, but they will need to have those supports. Whether it's home care or other types of care that allow someone to continue to live independently for as long as they can, all of that takes time and all of that takes resources. But most importantly, Speaker, it takes workers and it takes coordination.

It's important for us to address the wage and benefits gap when it comes to workers who are paid in community support services. What we're seeing is that that sector in particular—dominated by women; dominated by racialized women—is grossly, grossly underpaid. And that's not unintentional. I believe that is intentional, and they know it as well.

I have to talk about housing, because it is not possible for us to have an opportunity to pass the budget in Ontario in the grips of a housing and affordability crisis and not talk about what this government is doing to address the

housing crisis. They should be using every legislative lever in their portfolio, in their hands, to address the housing crisis. Whether it's vacancy decontrol, whether it's rent control, whether it's the building of new RGI units, whether it's new subsidies, whether it's new legislation to prevent rental demovictions, all of that is just a snapshot of some of the arsenal that they can use, and they are using none of it.

So they're not serious about addressing the housing crisis. There's really nothing in here that says that they're serious about meeting the needs of low-income and moderate-income individuals in Ontario, because if they were, some of those tools I talked about, the policy changes that are within the power of this government—they could do that, but they're choosing not to.

The housing sector, especially the non-profit housing sector, sees that, and they know they do not have a partner in this government. Regrettably, they know that they're in this all on their own. So who are they turning to? They're turning to the federal government, they're turning to their municipalities, and both of those government partners are saying, "Where's the province?"

What we've seen, Speaker, is that every single year, we have the association of interval and transition houses who make a request to have a \$60-million investment to offset the services to ensure that their workforce is stable. They do this every single year. And what we also heard during the pre-budget consultation is that other housing sector partners come to the province with the same request every single year. It's astounding that we have a government that's not willing to work with the non-profit sector, to actually support them to expand deeply affordable housing for Ontarians to meet them where they are needed.

Education is a very important topic that this House has direct purview over, and since 2018-19 funding for education has fallen to an alarming \$1,200 per student—peanuts—leaving us a laggard in Canada. Chronic underfunding creates a significant impact on the quality of education—the ability of hard-working teachers, education workers, administrators and trustees to deliver the resources and supports that students need.

Speaker, I was recently at the Toronto District School Board. I was outside of their building as the trustees were grappling with a massive budget deficit. They were put into a most impossible situation: Cut services to balance their budget or run a deficit—a symbolic deficit in this case—to send a message to the government that they will not play their game anymore.

That's not the only school board in Ontario that's struggling to make ends meet. Every school board is struggling. We're hearing this from every union and association that represents educators. We're hearing this loudly from parents—loudly from parents—when they are telling us that class sizes are too large, that their children cannot be successful, and if their children have special needs, God help them, because this government is not going to, and it's heartbreaking. I sit in this House, and I have the privilege of being able to work in this House, so close to the solution, and I can't reach it, but our members

across can do something about it. I know they've heard from their constituents about the same problem because their constituents have reached out to me, telling me that they tried to talk to their MPP or the Minister of Education without much success.

Speaker, in the 30 seconds I have, I just want to say that for Ontarians who are looking for a budget that will work for them, this budget clearly does not. If you're looking for a family doctor or better access to one, it's not going to help you. If you're a young person looking for housing, you're not going to see anything in this budget for you. If you're struggling with the cost of living, which most Ontarians are, there isn't enough in this budget to make it work for you either.

I'll tell you, Speaker, that we have resources and we have ideas. We need to work together, but we can't do it if the government's not willing to step forward. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to go to questions for the member.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Something which I'm really passionate about is making sure that the youth have the resources they need, and I'll give you an example. When I got elected in 2018, something I found out was that every high school in Peel has a sports facility. Malton was the only one with two high schools and no sports facility. Thanks to the ministry, both high schools now have track and field.

Something which I noticed in this bill is about making investments of \$200 million in the Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund, which will help build new rec, sport and community centres all across our province, including some of the NDP ridings as well.

Through you, Madam Speaker: I'd like to ask the member whether she will be joining this side in delivering our commitment to uphold the mental health, physical health and well-being of all Ontarians, and is she going to support this important investment?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to the member across for the question.

As I mentioned, a budget bill is a confidence bill, and you have to have confidence in the budget for us to pass this.

Well, let me tell you what's missing in this budget. There is no concrete increase for school repairs for 2024 and 2025, and the funding for the school repair backlog has decreased year over year. This budget is simply not supportable.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I listened to everything that my colleague from Toronto Centre was talking about, and there were so many really important points in those 20 minutes. But the one thing that I honed in on while they were talking about it was around the parents who are basically being forced by this government to surrender their children to children's aid, thinking—when they can't access the mental health supports that their children need—that if they surrender their kids to CAS, that CAS will be able to get them that access, which CAS cannot do. In my area, we have kids as young as four or five in hotel

rooms because they cannot get foster homes for these kids with their complex needs.

1640

So I'm wondering if my colleague can tell me if they see anything in this budget that will actually not only address the funding shortfalls that CAS is seeing but also the mental health supports and, in some cases, the developmental or intellectual supports for kids with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Is there anything in this bill that would address those issues?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: There is no new money for increased mental health supports for students. I want to just repeat that very clearly, because this government has talked about mental health supports. There is no new money in this budget for mental health supports for students.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Madam Speaker, I was listening to the member opposite, who was talking about the investments we're making in schools.

I just want to read that what we're doing here in the province is investing over \$23 billion, including \$16 billion in capital grants over the next 10 years, to build more schools and child care spaces, including a new joint French and English public school in Blind River, a new English public school in Ottawa, an additional Catholic elementary school in St. Thomas and a new French Catholic secondary school in Vaughan. This includes \$1.4 billion in funding for the current school year to support the repair and renewal needs of schools.

But what I do want to talk about is also the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund where we increased the investment from \$200 million to \$800 million. I do get it. The NDP usually says that we're not going far enough. So I again want to ask the member whether you will support the increase from \$200 million to \$800 million in the Housing-Enabling Water Systems Fund and are you going to support this bill?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I appreciate you citing that specific number; I really do. But if we just go down the page a little bit more, what we'll see is that infrastructure spending shows us a decrease in education spending. Yes, my note is tabbed because I have read the budget. You're getting less money year over year as we move from 2024 all the way to 2027. There is less and not more.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Toronto Centre for their presentation today.

Listening to the questions back and forth, children are our most valuable resource. Yet, we do not see them reflected in this budget whatsoever. We have over 60,000 children on a wait-list for autism services—I believe the last number I saw was 67,000. We have a budget that says \$120 million was going into that budget. Quite frankly, it's actually only \$60 million that's going in. The numbers are ridiculous for them to think that they're going to pull this off.

Then we talk about the schools. We have all of these children in schools without a day of service.

Can the member tell us what she has been hearing from her constituents about children and how they're struggling within our school system and teachers who are just not able to keep up?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you so much for that critically important question.

I'll tell you what I'm hearing from parents are tears and calls of rage. They have reached their wits' end. Why, Speaker? I'll tell you. Because the \$18 million that's allocated in this budget doesn't even come close to the actual need that our communities are looking for.

The TDSB, in 2022, spent \$67 million more on special education than they received—\$67 million more. More than half of the secondary school principals and nearly two thirds of the elementary principals have reported that they've asked their parents to keep their children with special needs at home. Don't even bother sending them to school, because they don't have the capacity to support them and there's nothing in this budget to actually change that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I do remember that. I'm from Schulich, so I am from York University. In 2018-19, the president came and we had a meeting with Minister Tibollo and York University talking about how important it is that we need to invest into public health care systems infrastructure. Thanks to the advocacy of all the members around in this caucus, the creation of a new medical school in Vaughan with York University is a major step towards our continued goal of attracting and retaining more doctors in the midst of family physician shortages. This is exactly the kind of action this province needs to take in order to continue building healthy communities for the future.

Through you, Madam Speaker: I would like to ask the member if she can help us to understand whether she will be voting in favour of such an important infrastructure investment we are planning to do in favour of doctors for tomorrow alongside with us—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Thank you for the question.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much for that question, once again.

I really appreciate this government's persistence. They love to re-announce announcements. So once again, we hear about the York University medical school, which is great, but they've announced that before. What they forget to tell us is that there's no associated funding attached to it.

We are also hearing that post-secondary institutions are running deficits. They were very loud and clear in their pre-budget consultation. They're running deficits; they've raided their reserves; they've sold off their assets. The well is dry and they need a partner that is going to step up, and multi-year funding that's sustainable and predictable, and that's not here in this budget.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We have time for a quick question.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm always happy to have an opportunity to talk about the shortfalls that we're definitely seeing within this budget.

We know people on OW, ODSP, had been put into legislated poverty years ago. This government says that it has made the biggest revelation in giving people an increase. They just increased further poverty. They did not do anything to help the situation. There are so many ways that they could improve people's lives.

Maybe the member would like to talk about her experience in Toronto Centre of people who are literally living in legislated poverty.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I have three of the poorest neighbourhoods in Toronto in my riding. This issue is deeply personal for my community, and if we had solutions in this budget that worked for us, I would be the first one to support it. I would join the government at that press conference. But there's nothing in here for my community, and there's no meaningful adjustment for ODSP and OW recipients.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to the budget bill, Bill 180. As we know, this government is not fond of hearing feedback from the opposition Liberals, so I don't take this time for granted. But it is an opportunity for me to share the concerns of my Don Valley West constituents with this budget and this government, Speaker—and believe you me, they had a lot to say.

The finance minister talked about this budget as one that sticks to their plan. It certainly does stick to their plan of fiscal irresponsibility. So my constituents were not surprised to see this budget continue the government's plan to divert money away from public services to private businesses. By the way, they're still upset about the ServiceOntario location operated by an independent service operator that serves my Thorncliffe constituents and those in Don Valley East, that's going to be closed down and their business given to Staples under a sole-source contract. I do wonder if the Premier would advise his business friends to do business that way.

Anyway, Speaker, they're not surprised that a government that added \$93 billion in debt—15% more debt than the Liberals did in their last six years, when they spend hour after hour talking about that Liberal government here in this House—is going to add another \$60 billion—\$60 billion—in the next few years.

I'd like to say I'm surprised by the lack of new measures to address urgent problems in our province, whether it's skyrocketing rents, ER closures, family doctor shortages, student mental health crises, overburdened food banks, bankrupt post-secondary institutions—the list goes on. It's really just a continuation, though, of the reckless spending of this government that gives money to their rich friends while telling people they are putting more money into the pockets of Ontarians.

1650

The government does indeed like to make reference to the former Liberal government, but Conservatives will not

be able to grow their way out of the debt problems they are giving to this province. GDP growth under this government is lower—1.5% on average—than it was under Kathleen Wynne’s government, which was 2.5% on average, all while government spending is higher than Kathleen Wynne, and services are worse.

When Liberals spent money, they did things like give us all-day kindergarten and free education for low-income post-secondary students, which improved their chances of success and improved their quality of life.

When this government spends billions more of our taxpayer money, it’s only their rich friends who benefit, so I’m not surprised. Overspending on initiatives that help their friends, big budget deficits, and inaction on key files have all become hallmarks of this Conservative government. Nonetheless, I am still disappointed and, frankly, shocked that in the days leading up to the release of the budget, the government labelled it as one of a cost-of-living budget. When I heard that I thought, “Wow, they’re finally hearing the message that there are people struggling. Maybe there will finally be some help for those households. But instead, it was a real shame that there was not one new measure to help people dealing with the cost of living.

There’s a long list of this government’s broken promises, policy flip-flops, and failures. In fact, it seems that they think that by moving quickly from one mess to another, they hope to confuse the public and make it hard for us all to keep track.

But Speaker, we are here to hold them to account and make sure that their record, such as the scandal of Bill 124, the most damaging piece of legislation to our publicly funded health care system—let’s not forget the RCMP criminal investigation into their \$8.3-billion greenbelt giveaway; their sole-sourcing of contracts to American companies while putting independent Ontario operators out of business; giving away the park at Ontario Place to a foreign-owned spa, and then giving that spa a half-billion-dollar parking lot to boot. Then, there’s the broken promise to middle income families for a tax cut, now broken for over 2,000 days.

The real shame is that there are no new measures to deal with the many crises that this government has orchestrated, no measures to relieve the administrative burden on family doctors—a 10% reduction in that could free up time for an additional two million patients a year—no new money to ensure hospitals don’t have to spend another billion dollars next year on private nursing and staffing agencies; no new money to ensure that teachers get the support staff in classrooms that they need to help those students who need extra help and help reduce the rising violence in our classrooms.

Ontarians are tired of this government and the crises they created in our public services. They’re tired of stagnant growth. They’re tired of hearing about how they’re building homes when they are way off their plan. Instead of owning up or stepping up on their housing record, they fudged the numbers by adding in long-term-care beds in the hopes that the people of Ontario will not notice.

A number of my constituents and others across Ontario who reach out to me as the Liberal finance critic wonder how we have the largest spending budget in Ontario history, under a Conservative government no less, yet the province is experiencing crises after crises. Never has a government spent so much to deliver so little. But the answer has to do with priorities. The government prioritizes their friends and insiders rather than the people of Ontario. I’ve been hearing from constituents about how the TDSB is having to choose between cutting education programs for seniors to prioritize their main mission, of course, which is serving kids, and those seniors are worried about those programs being cut.

I would have thought this government could have found a few million dollars in their budget to make sure that that school board was able to keep delivering services to their seniors without jeopardizing the success of their educational curriculum.

This government is indeed spending more than any government in Ontario’s history, yet, despite this, real spending on the things that matter to Ontarians—health care, education, child care, long-term care and post-secondary institution—remains stagnant in real dollars or have even declined.

According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, real spending on education has declined \$1,200 per student under this government. Similarly, compared to every other province, Ontario continues to spend the least per capita on both health care and post-secondary education. That is not the path to a successful future, Speaker. Ontario’s universities and colleges, the backbone of our economy, have actually been allocated less funding in this budget than they were last year. This is before accounting for inflation and it’s just not sustainable. The blue panel’s recommendations were crystal clear: Ontario’s colleges and universities need an additional \$2.5 billion to remain financially stable. This government has committed less than half of that funding, so it’s not a surprise that one third of our institutions are still projected to be in the red this year.

We’ve known for some time now that this government and the Premier are fond of helping their friends: for example, developers who own land near the greenbelt; they own land near Highway 413; they own private nursing agencies; they are long-term-care developers. We have former staff members and American-owned companies. And yet with this budget, they have taken helping their friends to a new level.

Let’s be clear, helping their friends does come at the expense of taxpayers and the people of Ontario. This Premier is spending more than double what Premier Wynne spent to staff his office—double, Speaker. That’s taking money away from the services that they could be providing to our citizens, our residents, and instead they’re putting it into the pockets of the Premier’s staffers.

Furthermore, despite grandstanding about how they’re helping “the little guy,” this government has also decided to give every member but one of its own caucus a promotion and therefore a pay bump. I don’t hear them

bragging about that in their “sunny day” ad campaign. But I could almost hear it now. Here it goes: “What if you lived in a place where every member but one of your government’s MPPs earned more than every other MPP? Well, you do. It’s happening right here in Ontario.”

Speaker, let’s be clear: It’s just another one of the ways this government changes the rules or gets around its own rules to make their friends richer. Let me remind the government that they put in place a law where MPPs across the board could not get a raise while there was a deficit. So what do they do instead? They have a \$9.8-billion deficit, then give raises to their MPPs by making sure that all but one are ministers or parliamentary assistants: 77 out of 78 MPPs in caucus. Shameful. Unfortunately, this is the kind of special treatment for insider friends that we’ve come to expect from this Conservative government.

But let’s get back to the numbers in the budget. This government has added over \$90 billion in debt since coming to power in 2018 and are projected to add another \$60 billion, and for what? What are we getting for the record amount of money being spent by this government? Speaker, I’ll tell you what we’re getting: We’re getting a record number of crises in every sector.

In health care, we have record ER closures. Under this government and this Minister of Health, we had three more rural ERs close just this past weekend. We have a wait-list for family doctors that’s record high and growing; 2.3 million Ontarians do not have access to a primary care provider. That number will skyrocket to 4.4 million as soon as 2026. And, Speaker, who benefits when people don’t have a family doctor they can access through the public system with their OHIP card? It’s the for-profit clinics that provide care you pay for with your credit card.

But instead of solving that problem, this budget only makes provisions to provide an additional 600,000 Ontarians access to a family doctor, and only by 2027. That means we will hear more and more in the years to come about Ontarians who are accessing care via for-profit clinics. I hear about that every week in my constituency office. In fact, hospitals in my riding are trying to find solutions for this because they know that 80% of people living in assisted living in my riding don’t have family doctors, and so they end up in the ER. That’s not good government.

This government hasn’t had the courage yet to say it, but they are defunding our public services—basically privatizing our public services—because we have a Premier who doesn’t actually believe in public services. That’s why he says the worst place you can give your money is to the government. In our public schools, we have growing staff shortages. According the recent Annual Ontario School Survey, 24% of elementary schools and 35% of secondary schools report facing staff shortages on a daily basis—record high staff shortages—under this government. Teachers and principals have cited several reasons, like mental health. Students are suffering from mental health. Young people are not doing well in this province, and it’s having an impact on our schools to function as safe places where kids can learn.

1700

Yet this budget barely even touches on this issue, proposing only to spend a paltry \$8.3 million over five years on youth mental health hubs. With about two million students in Ontario, that’s about 83 cents a year per student. That’s not going very far. There is no plan to expand access to mental health services in schools, where they are needed most.

So again, Speaker, where is all this record spending going, if not towards education and health care? It’s going to things like moving the science centre; to building Highway 413, a highway that will cut through more valuable farmland and only benefit private developers who are looking to build more car-dependent suburbs. The budget did find half a billion dollars to build an underwater parking garage for a foreign-owned spa. Those are the kinds of priorities of this government, not education and health care.

We shouldn’t forget about the hundreds of millions in federal dollars that this government has turned down because they won’t allow fourplexes as of right across this province. They wasted millions on fighting public sector workers in court and millions wasted on partisan Super Bowl ads. There is a pattern, Speaker, and it’s not a good one. The government is spending billions, costing Ontarians billions with their mistakes, and they’re mortgaging our future to pay for it all.

Last week, while answering questions about the budget, the Minister of Long-Term Care referenced my advocacy for a not-for-profit care home in my riding, and I did not have time to answer it, so let me summarize here. It seems the minister was upset I’d asked for help from his office to meet with that home, to provide clarity regarding their current contract, so they can have certainty to build new beds. But it seems that the not-for-profit sector, despite providing better care at a lower cost, always seems to be last in line.

Speaker, Ontario does have a bright future, but it’s not with a budget like this that adds billions to our debt and puts the future of Ontario at risk.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We’re going to go to questions for the member.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: My question for the member is about highways. In my riding of Essex, we’re expanding Highway 3 from two to four lanes, and I think that’s a very important investment to be made. I think it kind of exemplifies the approach to highways and infrastructure investment that this government has. We believe in infrastructure investment. We believe in the expansion of highways.

On the other side, I would say that there’s an example that the Liberals actually are opposed to expanding highways, and that is probably exemplified by the statement of the federal Liberal environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, who says he doesn’t want to build any more highways. So I ask this member: Where does she stand? Does she stand in favour of investment in infrastructure and highways like Highway 3, or does she stand with Steven Guilbeault?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Well, I stand in favour of building things that benefit Ontarians. The highway in the member's riding I'm not familiar with; it may benefit Ontarians, and certainly I would encourage that. Highway 413, we know from this government's own ministry, does not benefit Ontarians, Speaker. It saves 30 seconds. It will certainly, though, benefit the rich developers who own land around that area. That is not the kind of thing we should be prioritizing. We need to be prioritizing spending money on investing in things like our post-secondary institutions, who are feeling the pain right now, who have deficits. That will only cause the future of Ontario to grow dimmer, just like our solar eclipse today.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member for Don Valley West for her presentation. I'm wondering, because I know the member has expertise in financial management and a financial background, and you've commented a lot on what you believe to be the deficiencies from a financial perspective in the government's budget—spending a whole lot, as the member from Ottawa South often likes to say, for not a lot.

Transit: I'm looking at a government that—unless you look at the city of Toronto, thanks to Mayor Olivia Chow—we don't have a lot of money for operating the buses that we operate in many of our municipalities. Certainly in Ottawa, we're 74,000 service hours short for OC Transpo this year because of government cutbacks. But meanwhile, the cost of building transit under the Conservative government has climbed to a billion dollars per kilometre for the Ontario Line, that I know you care about in this city. The Eglinton West Crosstown: 3 years overdue—a billion dollars over budget.

Can the member talk about the financial mismanagement of transit projects under this government and, from your perspective in Don Valley West, how much would putting more money into transit operating funds all over the province matter to you?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question.

Certainly, public transportation has been proven to be a driver of economic growth, so I'm absolutely in support of public transit. We cannot allow the death spiral that is happening, as the member referenced, in Ottawa happen here in Toronto. When ridership goes down, revenues go down, service goes down—it's a death spiral.

In Ontario, we have one of the lowest-funded public transportation systems in the world and we need to make sure that we get that back as a priority for not just Toronto—for Ottawa and for other cities that are growing and need to have public transit to make sure that workers across the province can get to work in an energy-efficient way. And that helps our environment too, so absolutely, we need more public transit.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, Ontario families are struggling, whether it's to pay their rent, pay their

mortgage, to get their kids something extra—they're using their credit card to access basic medical services for themselves and for their children.

Leadership starts at the top, so I would like the member to tell me her thoughts on the fact that the Premier's office budget more than doubled to \$7 million a year. It went from 20 staff to 48 staff on the sunshine list and each of those 48 staff make more money than the median Ontario family—the median Ontario family—some of them, twice as much, some of them, three times as much and some of them four times as much.

Can the member expound on whether this is really fair or right for Ontario families?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for Ottawa South for the question.

Speaker, again, it really does just show the priorities of this government. They didn't take out an ad talking about the increases in the Premier's staff budget. I wonder why. It's because it's nothing to be proud of—doubling the budget is not a good use of taxpayer money and it's not a good use of this government's resources.

When you think about adding people to the sunshine list when families are suffering, when we've got families who are, in record numbers, going to food banks—we've got people with full-time jobs going to food banks because they can't afford the cost of living in this province. We have a Premier who took away rent control so that rent is now an even bigger portion of people's take-home income.

So, Speaker, I think this government has its priorities all mixed up and this is a perfect example of that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I want to say thank you to the member from Don Valley West. We were together at the budget consultations and we heard from people across Ontario about investing in skills training through the Skills Development Fund—SDF, as we call it.

Through this budget, we are investing another \$100 million for 2024-25 to help workers and job seekers. This is in addition to the \$860 million that has been invested since its launch in 2021. To date, the government has delivered close to 600 training projects, supported over 500,000 workers, including those in the skilled trades and health care taking the next step in their career.

My question to the member is very simple: Do you think \$100 million is enough investment in SDF, or do you think we should invest more in SDF?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the question. I enjoyed travelling across the province with him on our pre-budget consultations. It's always a pleasure.

Speaker, certainly, there are programs that we're spending on that do benefit workers. But this budget did not brag about the billions of dollars that came out of the public purse to fix a wrong done by this government to workers who really do matter, our health care workers. Bill 124—this government has had to pay \$6 billion so far for reparations on that. There's probably another \$7 billion more to come, so while I appreciate the \$100 million spent

on skilled trades, this government certainly has not prioritized workers across our province.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: The budget makes mention of a few announcements that are being recycled, so the government is reannouncing the Ontario Made Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit. They've reannounced the advanced manufacturing and innovation competitiveness stream. They've reannounced the target benefit framework, but I couldn't find anything in the budget that actually targets support for businesses who are still struggling through COVID recovery; nor did I find anything that would actually boost wages to increase and build new jobs so we can transition to a low-carbon economy. Did you find anything in the budget that speaks to those concerns and needs for Ontarians?

1710

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Thank you to the member for the very good question. The answer is no, Speaker. In fact, I provided some suggestions to this government about things that would do exactly that—for example, Digital Main Street, and extending that program beyond the current fiscal year. That would help Ontario small businesses grow and expand. Instead of spending money on highways and long-term-care homes through their \$3-billion bank that they're now calling a fund, they could have taken that money, as I suggested, as my caucus suggested, to spend it on things that do help us transition to the green economy; things that will advance our work in innovation in health care, in genomes and in lots of areas where we have the opportunity to create new jobs in the new industries of the future and drive productivity growth for our province.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. Adil Shamji: To the member for Don Valley West: I must admit I found it very amusing to see the taxpayer-funded advertisements by this government trying to sell their mismanagement as prudent financial work.

Could I ask you to elaborate a little bit on how their poor fiscal mismanagement has contributed to this province's paltry economic growth?

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: Again, when you build highways that aren't necessary, that doesn't drive productivity growth. What drives productivity growth is workers who are skilled, workers who have a sound education, people who have homes they can afford.

When I talk to people in the business world, they talk about the concerns that people have in our province, the concerns that capital owners have for our province, when they say people don't have a place to live, and how can we hire skilled workers here and retain our workers when they don't have an affordable place to live?

Those are the kinds of things that do not drive economic growth. We need to make sure our institutions are well-funded, that our post-secondary institutions get the money they need to provide the education they need to advance our productivity growth into the future.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate. Further debate?

The Minister for Seniors and Accessibility.

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Hello, everyone.

Madam Speaker, I feel very honoured to rise today in support of Ontario's budget known as Building a Better Ontario. I will split my time with the member for Mississauga Centre.

The 2024 budget demonstrates how Premier Ford and our entire government are delivering on the plan to build a better Ontario by investing in infrastructure to get more homes built faster, attracting better jobs with a bigger paycheque, keeping costs down for families and businesses and working on a path to balance.

Another thing this budget is doing is continuing to build a better Ontario for our seniors. Our seniors are the most important people. They are the ones who raised the families. Our seniors are the ones who built the best province in the world, Ontario. Our seniors are the ones who have built the best country in the world, Canada. This budget shows how our government remains committed to stable, predictable funding for programs and services to build a better Ontario for our seniors. As I travel around the province, I see how we are providing great programs and building on our services for our seniors.

I was in Havelock not too long ago celebrating the opening of a new senior active living centre with the MPP for Peterborough-Kawartha. The seniors I met there were so happy that our government was investing in this new centre. They see first-hand the benefits of what our government is doing, as we continue to increase our investments for our seniors.

I was in Amherstburg just last week to open another new senior active living centre. The seniors there were so happy that they will now have a place where they can come and meet old friends and be together with new friends. It's amazing to see just how active our seniors are when they come together. I was also in Kingsville, in Essex county, with the MPPs for Essex and Windsor-Tecumseh. The energy we received from all of the seniors was amazing.

One of the highlights was meeting up with the senior achievement award winner while I was in Essex County. She travelled to join in the celebration. It was so great to see her again. I was able to meet with her and present the senior achievement award here at Queen's Park in February.

I was in Innisfil just this past Friday, with the MPP for Innisfil, celebrating another new senior active living centre. This new mobile senior activity centre is travelling around the region, bringing programs and services to seniors in their communities. This is so important because it allows seniors to stay connected.

Staying connected is so important because it fights social isolation. Social isolation is public enemy number one for our seniors, and building a better Ontario for our seniors means we are building a better network, bringing programs and services to our seniors at the local and community level.

When I was in Bryanston, just last month, outside of London, I joined a line dancing class as we celebrated the opening of another new senior active living centre. We had so much fun. It was an honour and pleasure to meet with all the seniors in that part of Ontario.

I could tell that the new senior active living centre meant a great deal. Thanks to the leadership of Premier Ford and the hard work of the Minister of Finance, our entire government is laser-focused on getting the programs and services seniors need at the local level. We now have 316 senior active living centres. We are investing a record amount into those centres and those communities because our seniors deserve our dignity and respect. But that's not all we are doing for our seniors.

This year, Madam Speaker, we will see a [*inaudible*] amount invested in bringing a greater, better Ontario for our seniors with our senior community grants. Since 2018, we have invested close to \$30 million on 1,500 projects all across Ontario. Everywhere I travel to and meet our seniors who are benefiting from these investments, I see first-hand how our seniors stay fit, active, healthy, socially connected and close to their home in their communities.

1720

We are anticipating that we will announce over 250 seniors community grants during Seniors' Month in June. All across Ontario, we'll show with this investment that we are building a better Ontario for our seniors.

One area where we are also supporting our seniors is the Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit. This is something I know that the Minister of Finance is passionate about. The Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit is designed to help seniors live in their homes for as long as they want. And when we talk about building a better Ontario, we also look to strengthen our villages, towns, neighbourhoods and cities by having people who chose to live in those communities all across Ontario have the ability stay and continue to build a better town, village or city they live in. The Ontario Seniors Care at Home Tax Credit is doing just that. It is helping seniors access the right care they need. It is helping seniors bring the right care to them in their own homes.

You see, Madam Speaker, building a better Ontario includes building a better Ontario for our seniors, those who are young and young at heart, because one day all of us will become seniors. That is why, thanks to the leadership of Premier Ford and the hard work of the Minister of Finance, we are building a better Ontario for our seniors for today, tomorrow and well into the future.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I now recognize the member for Mississauga Centre.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: I'm very proud to rise in this chamber to speak to how our government's budget, Building a Better Ontario, continues to help seniors, families, caregivers and our communities.

This past month, I was truly humbled and honoured to be appointed to two portfolios very near and dear to my heart. I now serve as parliamentary assistant to both the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility and the Minister of Long-Term Care a privilege I couldn't be more thankful for.

I can't emphasize enough how happy I am to join the Minister for Seniors—a super senior himself—to be an advocate for our incredible seniors in Ontario. The minister himself is an incredibly accomplished man who not only has many years of experience as a public servant, but also three decades of political experience, and on top of that has four university degrees. I think me and the minister have something in common: a love for lifelong learning.

His six years in charge of the seniors file have been remarkable, to say the least. When I visit seniors in my riding, I hear how thankful they are for his initiative, devotion, humour and energy that he brings to this file, one of them being our incredible seniors dental program bringing care to seniors who need it the most.

Madam Speaker, seniors didn't just raise us; they built Ontario. They built our roads, our homes and started businesses that flourish to this day. It is up to us to return the favour and take care of them. It is our duty, and it is one that we take very seriously.

Another super senior I want to highlight is Hazel McCallion, our former mayor of Mississauga, who worked well into her senior years building our great city. Her hard work and dedication resulted in many investments and local landmarks we appreciate to this day: not only our famous Celebration Square, but also Sheridan College, one of the most esteemed schools in Canada. She was also a champion for women's hockey and saw the transformation of our city from farmland into a thriving and vibrant urban centre.

Another senior I cannot forget to mention is Father Angelos from the Virgin Mary Coptic church in Mississauga, who I had the honour of joining this past weekend with the Premier and my colleagues. Father—or Abuna, as we like to call him—Angelos's work in the community is a testament of the man of God he is, living out his faith and taking care of our community. Because of his great work, he is not only providing spiritual care to parishioners, but he's also helping to build long-term-care homes, schools, career colleges and day cares in Mississauga. He also helped to build Aghabi Place, an affordable-rate apartment building that is home to many accessible units for residents with disabilities.

It is on the shoulders of these senior giants that I am so fortunate to stand as I embark on this new journey in my political career. Since being elected, I travelled not just in my riding, but across the province, meeting seniors and learning about each person's unique culture and experiences. Many times a year, I visited two local co-op buildings in my riding, Camille's Place and Aghabi Place, home to a vibrant population of seniors, where I enjoyed holding round tables and consultations, celebrating Christmas, Easter and the many different diverse holidays that we are fortunate to have in Mississauga.

Camille's Place is also home to my adoptive grandmother, Shirley—and she might be watching today; hi, Shirley—whom I've shared many memorable moments with, attending picnics and celebrations, as well as our famous Lobsterfest. Madam Speaker, she is the number

one seller for I don't know how many years in a row. She sells out the house, so if anyone wants to come to the Mississauga Lobsterfest, call Grandma Shirley. She'll hook you up.

Madam Speaker, my past portfolio with the Ministry of Francophone Affairs also had me travelling across Ontario, meeting Franco-Ontarian seniors who are living in long-term-care homes that cater to their linguistic needs, respecting our country's two official languages. It further cemented that no two seniors in Ontario are the same. They are a diverse community, each with their own unique needs, and it is up to us to do our part in serving them to the best of our ability.

As the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility just explained, when it comes to fighting social isolation, our government is investing in the kinds of programs and services that help keep seniors fit, active, healthy, socially connected and close to their homes and communities. We have living proof: the more than 300 active living centres across Ontario that recently benefited from our government's efforts to expand programs and services. There are now 17 new seniors' active living centres across the province, but our government is also increasing the funding for all 316 SALCs, so they can provide more programs and services to the hundreds of thousands of seniors who participate in everything from tai chi to Zumba classes to cooking classes to health and well-being seminars, to a better understanding of money matters and tax tips, to being with old friends and meeting new ones. This is permanent, stable and predictable funding that seniors across Ontario can rely on.

This is also why we are also stepping up supports for some of our most vulnerable by expanding the annual income eligibility threshold for the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System program for low-income seniors, and ensuring that the benefit is indexed to the rate of inflation. This one move will result in about 100,000 more Ontario seniors receiving support, while increasing the support that eligible seniors receive.

Madam Speaker, one thing is clear: Our government will always be in the corner with our seniors. They are the backbone of our province, and I draw inspiration from their experiences each and every day. The seniors in Mississauga Centre and in every riding across this province deserve everything and more.

That is why our government continues to invest in Seniors Community Grants. I was excited to share with Mississauga seniors when I let them know that applications have been opened just last month. We want to ensure that seniors have the means to live healthy and active lives, while staying socially connected to their communities, and the Seniors Community Grant Program provides senior groups funding to deliver a wide variety of activities to promote engagement, reduce social isolation and promote healthy living. This can include something like a seniors' bingo night, a computer skills workshop, arts and crafts activities, trips and more.

1730

Last year, we invested \$6 million into over 280 groups and organizations for activities for seniors, and we will

continue to do so this year. This is what we accomplished since 2018, and it is what we will continue to do as we build a better Ontario for our seniors. I'm also excited to share that this year we will see over 120 seniors' fairs, bringing our seniors together at the local and community levels. These fairs showcase and promote local services, programs and activities, and bring our seniors together so they can plan for the year ahead with local and community-based programming and services, or simply meet up with each other and have some fun.

Another great line item in our budget is our further investment into home care. And, Madam Speaker, this one is a very important one. We're increasing the funding from \$1 billion; we're adding an additional \$2 billion. And what this will mean for seniors in my riding of Mississauga Centre and across the province is that they will be able to age at home. They will be able to have that PSW or that nurse come to their home, do the wound dressing change or help them in the activities of daily living. This is an incredible investment because we realize we need to stabilize the workforce when it comes to our home care. This \$2 billion is to boost this acceleration and increase compensation for PSWs, nurses and other care providers; and this funding is not just for home care, but for community care, as well, going towards senior day programs, meal services and transportation.

Madam Speaker, there are many more exciting investments in this budget. One that I would mention quickly is that we are investing a significant amount of money to train about 3,000 more nurses. That includes registered nurses and registered practical nurses. So, we are doing everything we can—we're leaving no stone unturned—to ensure that we are providing for our seniors. They deserve the care; they deserve our compassion. They deserve to know that they have a government that has their backs and will continue to do so.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to go to questions.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's nice to hear the government say that they care about seniors, but the reality is, 6,000 people died in long-term-care facilities in the province of Ontario under your watch—6,000. And 78% died in for-profit homes—78%.

There is not one mention in this budget to talk about not-for-profit care. We all know they receive better care when it's not-for-profit because it's about care, not profit. We know that. They brought in Bill 7 because they cared so much about seniors and forced them out of the hospitals with alternate level of care without their consent, Madam Speaker. And I know that you don't even like it. You can't say that today, but I know you don't like it.

My question is very clear, and I wish the minister was here: When will they take the profit out of long-term care and start saving seniors' lives that are dying every day in our long-term-care facilities?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: You know what? I'm so proud to stand here on this side of the House to speak about our record in building long-term care. Let's be very clear: While the previous Liberal government only built

some 600-odd long-term-care beds in 15 years, our government has built more than does the city of Mississauga. That's a very clear record. We're also investing significant amounts of dollars to increase staffing ratios in our long-term-care facilities. Even in this particular budget, we're investing \$155.5 million to extend the construction funding subsidy top-up. This means that those 58,000 beds that are in the pipeline will get additional funding to make sure those projects come to completion.

So you know what, Madam Speaker? We have 70,000 seniors living in long-term care across the province and we need every single one of those providers to continue providing care for our seniors so they can receive compassionate care, especially at the end of their life.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Mr. John Fraser: Just to clarify the member's comments: 30,000 beds were built or rebuilt from 2003 to 2018.

Interjection: No way.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, go and check it. Public record.

But here's my question—and I didn't get an answer this morning and I didn't get an answer—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Order.

Mr. John Fraser: The Premier's office budget, in five years, has more than doubled to \$7 million a year. He started out with 20 staff; now he's got 48—a little army of his own. Those 48 people—and that's not including people who are on the sunshine list, but 48 of those people are on the sunshine list and they are all earning more than the median Ontario family; some of them twice as much; some three times as much; some four times as much.

On what planet is it a good idea for the Premier to enrich his office in this way? I hope somebody on the other side can answer that question, because I haven't heard an answer for that yet.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Respectfully, the member had every opportunity, as PA to the Minister of Health, to increase investments in health care, to build more long-term care, to build culturally appropriate long-term-care homes. What did the member do? None of the above, and that is why, when we came into power, we had to catch-up to build more long-term-care homes, and our record speaks for itself.

Do you know what else I'm proud of? Our Ontario Learn and Stay program, which was another thing that member could have delivered but hasn't. Currently, we have 3,800 students benefiting from the Ontario Learn and Stay program, and they will stay in those far and remote communities to provide the care that those seniors and patients need.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question?

Ms. Jess Dixon: The member for Mississauga Centre, as a practising nurse and someone completing her masters in nursing and who I know has particular expertise in dementia and has in fact originated many of the motions in this House in relation to dementia—we've had a number

of conversations about this issue, and I really want to congratulate you on your new placement as a PA. It couldn't be more well-deserved.

So as somebody that I think probably has far more expertise than anybody else in this House in this area, both academically and professionally, I wonder if you can explain a little bit more from your experience not just as a politician but also as a nurse what you think is in this budget and the province's record in this area.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much for that question. I really appreciate it.

Dementia may not be a sexy topic to talk about in politics, but I think that when we all door-knock, it doesn't matter which side of the House you were on in the last election, I think every single member in this House heard a story about a dementia patient, a loved one, a spouse, a mother, a brother or a sister, suffering from this debilitating cognitive disease.

So while dementia is not a natural part of aging, age is a risk factor for dementia. So what we do know, Madam Speaker, is that we have close to a 70%, or even more, dementia diagnosis within our long-term-care sector. This is a significant challenge that health care providers need to deal with.

That is why I was really proud to introduce my bill, Bill 121, Improving Dementia Care in Ontario Act, to ensure that our PSWs are trained on how to provide person-centred dementia care in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Next question.

Miss Monique Taylor: It's always interesting to be in the House, watching the moon eclipse the sun and leaving the people of Ontario in the dark because the Conservatives are constantly benchmarking the Liberals for what's appropriate. We watched the Liberals let people of Ontario down and now the Conservatives have continued on that same trend, because we still have legislated poverty. We have a housing crisis that we've never seen. Our health care system is in shambles and being privatized.

This is the state of what we see in Ontario, and it is so unfortunate for democracy because what it does is, it continues to show people that they don't want to be involved, and that's how we get a super majority government with 18% of the eligible electorate.

Does the member think that they could actually do better than just thinking they do better than the Liberals—because it's not really a great benchmark.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: To answer your question, our voters turned out to vote. For us, the voter turnout was great. Maybe you should do a better job engaging your voters, who obviously didn't turn out to vote.

1740

Madam Speaker, what I will say is that the NDP wants to have it both ways. We do have a \$9-billion deficit—but that's not a deficit; it's an investment. If we didn't have it, you would say, "How come we're cutting and we're not

investing?" So the NDP keeps on spinning things and speaking from both sides of their mouth.

This is a great investment, this budget of \$215 billion that we're investing into health care, into long-term care—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Sorry; I need to ask the member to withdraw please.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to go to the next question.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Before I ask my question, I want to acknowledge my colleague the MPP from Mississauga Centre, who is the parliamentary assistant to the Minister for Seniors and Accessibility. She's also the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Long-Term Care. She's a member of the Standing Committee on Justice Policy, and she is also a member of the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

You carry a lot of weight, so congratulations. My daughter is going to become a nurse, and I know she looks up to you. She talks to you about that, as well.

Talking about health care support—all Ontarians expect and deserve access to health care in our province. We have heard it from the great Minister of Health. Having the shortfall emergency department wait times in Canada is not good enough for our government. We know that Ontarians want us to continue the work we've been doing to support our health care system and lower wait times.

So from your experience and through this budget 2024, can you advise us and tell us, what is the government doing?

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: Thank you so much for that question.

I'm very, very proud of this budget because we are investing \$965 million, on average, which is a 4% increase, to hospital base funding for a second year in a row. This is a great contrast to the previous Liberal government that did what? Froze hospital budgets for four years before they got booted out of power.

We are investing almost \$1 billion to decrease wait times, and we'll continue to do that.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): We're going to move to further debate.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to join today's lively debate and to speak on behalf of the people of Hamilton Mountain, who I am always proud to serve here in the Legislature.

I just want to set the stage for people at home that this is a \$214.5-billion budget. It is actually the largest budget in history in Ontario—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): I'm sorry to interrupt. I'm going to ask the members to quiet down so that I can hear the member. If you want to take your discussion outside, that's always an option. Thank you.

I'll give the floor back to the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker.

Once again, this is a \$214.5-billion budget, the largest budget in history. It goes against everything Premier Ford had said coming into office. There is a net debt of \$439 billion, which is up \$100 billion since 2018. We have a \$9.8-billion deficit.

It's truly unbelievable to watch this government spend money out the door as quick as it can and yet see people fail in every direction.

Every ministry that I see, that I hear about, is on fire. We hear from people on a regular basis who are struggling each and every day. They are shuffling money out for highways that are going to save 60 seconds for a commuter when we could actually put the 407—

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: The Minister of Transportation should listen to this, because it actually is a really great idea that they refused to listen to, probably because of the big dollars in the 407. We could put trucks on the 407, take them off the 400s and really save time for commuters in the province. But they don't want to hear that. They want to build a highway for billions of dollars for their rich friends who have properties across that area, and we've definitely—

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: The minister has a lot to say. I can't wait until it's his turn to stand up and speak and have a say about something that isn't written for him, before him each and every day.

Have an opinion. Use your time wisely and stand up and use it, not mine.

That's just how we start here in the Legislature.

We are seeing children at record numbers who have severe mental health—we are watching children die by suicide at alarming rates.

We are seeing children enter a school system that is completely under-resourced and who have not had a day of service for whatever ailment they may have.

Sixty-seven thousand of them on wait-lists for autism services—that says a lot about this government's record. When they came into power in 2018, I think the number was about 23,000 kids on wait-lists, and we just thought that was absolutely—the Conservatives were standing over in these desks; they were pounding on their desks, going after the Liberals, for 23,000 kids on wait-lists for autism services, and now we see 67,000. They can say what they want over there, but their program is a huge failure. They can talk about the number of kids that they believe are enrolled in services, but they're not core services.

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: She should actually pay attention so maybe she'll learn something, so that she can advocate on behalf of children instead of allowing them to just fall into a system with zero resources and supports.

The common sense that we see come out of that government is zero—zero—when it comes to actually helping children, our truly most valuable resource. They are our future, and yet they are left without resources; they're left without services; they're left without enough adults in the classroom to ensure their safety.

I've heard parents tell me that the safety plan for their autistic child is bells on the door, so that if the door opens, an adult will hear it if they're going to run. That's the solution. Let's put bells on the door.

I put forward a missing persons bill to help with these children who do flee, to help with dementia. The member opposite talks very clearly about her support for people with dementia. Why doesn't she want to help them when they go missing? Bill 74 is an additional tool in the tool box. Is it the only resource? Absolutely not. Is it something that could be implemented at the snap of a finger by the OPP if they think it's appropriate? Absolutely. Why this government has taken that bill and shelved it in the justice committee, I will actually probably never know. People are still asking for that bill; they're still calling for it to be called. There are over 100,000 signatures out in public, asking for that bill to be passed.

What they did do, and what they did mention in their bill, was that when they buy the four helicopters for Toronto, it's also to help find the missing vulnerable people. This is where they found the ability to actually talk about missing vulnerable people—for four helicopters that they're going to give to Toronto. I don't know. Maybe it will work. I think it's kind of far-fetched.

There are so many things—

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: I can't wait until she gets up—actually, she did, but she read her notes the entire time, so she didn't get to use any of her own opinions. She only read what was written for her, and now she has a lot to say over my opinions. It's an unfortunate situation that the member has put herself in, but it's not my problem. She should actually respect my time and my opinion and sit quietly and listen, because she really might learn something—probably not.

In Hamilton, our Hamilton health teams have worked so hard to put together a plan that was recognized by 67 of our Hamilton health care providers. I just want to find the notes so I get the actual, true numbers. There's a lot to say. I really wish that they would just listen to actual, real stuff that happens in our communities that they could learn something from.

1750

Greater Hamilton Health Network—they put in this detailed proposal for \$20 million. They worked for seven months, I believe it was, to actually have the opportunity to bring—and I think it was 67 organizations. As you can all imagine, that's a lot of organizations to bring together under one program and to get everybody to agree with it. They worked really hard to make that happen.

That proposal would have cost \$20 million to set Hamilton up, to ensure that we had nearly 170 additional health care providers, to ensure that we had family doctors in the area. The 72-page plan involved a wide range of innovative strategies to connect 55,000 residents who have no family doctor in Hamilton, Haldimand, Lincoln and West Lincoln, which also includes Grimsby, Vineland and Smithville. Out of the \$20 million, they received \$2.2 million. What a slap in the face to the people they put in positions to actually find solutions to get this done. What

could they possibly pull together with that \$2.2 million instead of the \$20 million that they asked for? How could you possibly expect them to come together? People who didn't really want to buy in were then convinced because they saw the brilliance of the plan and they showed up and they actually got involved and they got excited—they are now walking away, saying, "Why bother? This government doesn't want to listen to anybody." The \$2.2 million is not going to solve the doctor shortage in our city, when we had a plan, we had the experts on the ground who submitted that plan.

There has been money that has gone out across the province that doesn't make sense. Peterborough got, I think, more money than Hamilton. I think I heard Peterborough got 32 or something—they got more money than Hamilton, anyway, which doesn't even make sense. And nothing against Peterborough—Peterborough deserves it. People across this entire province deserve it. But our needs in Hamilton and our population are much greater—our needs are much higher. We have a homeless situation that is completely out of control. There are tents in every direction. There are mental health and addiction issues in every direction. We have people standing on every main corner, asking for money, and we have no solutions.

This budget did absolutely zero—zero—to help our communities. What they actually did was, they downloaded more responsibilities onto the municipality, who can't—oh, and that was one of the richest things, this morning. The minister was talking, during question period, about the fact that there were no new taxes for the people of Ontario; they did their best to keep it all down. I wish I could have written it down in his actual words because it was pretty good.

When you think about it, there is only one taxpayer. It doesn't matter what level of government those people are paying taxes to; they're still paying taxes. And when our municipalities had to increase taxes due to their legislation, that is still their tax.

They can spin it off any way they want, but under Bill 23—and they took away those development charges from municipalities and then went back and gave them peanuts. I believe Hamilton got half of what it lost for building all of our houses and exceeding our targets, which is fantastic. And thank you to the people of Hamilton—those city hall department folks who really worked hard to make sure that we hit our benchmarks and that we did that within our boundaries, regardless of what this government tried to push our community to do. We did it without touching the greenbelt. We kept it within our urban boundaries that were already existing. We exceeded those targets and they gave us half of what we lost.

So that other \$17 million of infrastructure costs has to go somewhere. So what happened? Our property taxes go up. Is that not your government still downloading more taxes onto the municipality, which has no choice but to filter down to us?

They can talk all they want about no tax increase, but it's the same taxpayer who's footing the same bill that you just downloaded to somebody else's responsibility to try

to make yourself look good, and that's exactly what happened.

Developmental services—Community Living was begging. They've been here. You were all down there taking photos: “La, la, la, I'm so happy they're all here.” They were begging for 5%. They haven't had an increase in over 10 years—in over 10 years. Community Living, taking care of our most vulnerable residents, who again are left behind by this government—and they gave them 2.2%. What the heck is that? That's not enough to keep the doors open.

We're already actually hearing from folks who are caught up in the—uh, something journey. I don't have it with me.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: See? You could use some notes.

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, yes. Jeez. If only she had an opinion that she could use, but she doesn't. She has to just sit over there and heckle me on mine.

Hon. David Piccini: You don't know what you're talking about.

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, I do.

Journey to Belonging is the program that is now seeing privatization. We're seeing Community Living homes—

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: You did nothing. The NDP did nothing—

Miss Monique Taylor: You should listen to this. It actually affects vulnerable people. You should pay attention.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: That's your track record.

Miss Monique Taylor: My track record is pretty good.

Journey to Belonging is now seeing Community Living homes being sold off for profit—

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Speak to the Chair.

Miss Monique Taylor: “Who cares?” Is that what you said? “Who cares?”

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Speak to the Chair.

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, yes. Speaker, I would love—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Excuse me. This is totally out of control, so I will ask people to just calm down and try to be quiet.

And yes, it is true: You need to make your comments through the Chair. I was just about to say something.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. I would appreciate talking through the Chair, but when I have them yelling in my ear, I have no choice to respond to them. So I will do better to just pay attention to you and to ignore

them, because quite frankly, if they actually had an opinion of their own, they would be able to stand up and say it, but they do not.

I understand that they hate my opinions, but my opinions come from real people. They come from real stories. They come from seniors who have adult children who have lived in community homes for 40 years, and now those homes are under threat of privatization and nobody will answer their questions. Nobody knows what's happening. Everything is a veil of secrecy.

And these families are stressed. These parents have advocated. Imagine: They're in their seventies; their children are in their forties, and they're high-needs. And so they're in these homes that they have been in for all of these years, these beautiful homes that they have relationships with, and this government is allowing them to be privatized. They have no idea what's happening, and the ministry refuses to answer their questions. If the government would have seen fit to ensure that the 5% increase that Community Living had been begging, begging, begging for—they all showed up for the photo ops, and refused to give it to them.

My heart sank when I heard that they didn't get the 5%. I couldn't believe it. I thought there was no way that they're not going to get it. They were at every pre-budget consultation throughout this province, making sure members clearly heard their plea for that 5%, and they got 2.2%. It's just an absolute disregard for human life, for vulnerable human lives that count on a system to care for them, for senior parents who finally thought that they were going to be able to just rest and not have to advocate their entire lives, because you know these families have been fighting the system and advocating their entire lives just to keep their kids safe.

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: And the member continues to go on, but yet she has zero opinion. She just read an entire note, probably written by her staff, and now she has got so much to say.

Ms. Natalia Kusendova-Bashta: It's your carbon tax.

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, she wants to talk about the carbon tax? Well, we—

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): Unfortunately, we're not going to be talking anymore. This is the end of the day.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (M^{me} Lucille Collard): It is 6 o'clock, and this House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, April 9, at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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Pierre, Natalie (PC)	Burlington	
Pirie, Hon. / L'hon. George (PC)	Timmins	Minister of Mines / Ministre des Mines
Quinn, Nolan (PC)	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	
Rae, Matthew (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (IND)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Northern Development / Ministre du Développement du Nord Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Riddell, Brian (PC)	Cambridge	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Hon. / L'hon. Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Sarrazin, Stéphane (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Saunderson, Brian (PC)	Simcoe—Grey	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	
Shamji, Adil (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	Deputy Speaker / Vice-Présidente Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Présidente du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, David (PC)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Graydon (PC)	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Smith, Laura (PC)	Thornhill	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Surma, Hon. / L'hon. Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Hon. / L'hon. Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	Associate Minister of Small Business / Ministre associée déléguée aux Petites Entreprises
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain / Hamilton-Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Hon. / L'hon Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	Associate Minister of Transportation / Ministre associé des Transports
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions / Ministre associé délégué au dossier de la Santé mentale et de la Lutte contre les dépendances
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Vaugcois, Lise (NDP)	Thunder Bay—Superior North / Thunder Bay—Supérieur-Nord	
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Williams, Hon. / L'hon. Charmaine A. (PC)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity / Ministre associée des Perspectives sociales et économiques pour les femmes
Wong-Tam, Kristyn (NDP)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	
Vacant	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Vacant	Milton	